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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

MEXICO...a Santos Laguna fan outside the aptly named Corona Stadium in Torreon prior to the Liga MX match against Necaxa which was played behind closed doors

CLUB
Santos
LAGUNA A.C.

UCHÃO
Ipiranga
2020
FGF
#perguntala
O FRANGO MAIS SAU
betsul
umbro
Banrisul
GRÊMIO

BRAZIL...Gremio players wear face masks ahead of their state championship game against Sao Luiz

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FROM THE EDITOR

For much of the past month it has been hard to focus on football, but the extraordinary global events have provided a reminder, to borrow a phrase from Arrigo Sacchi, that football is the most important of the unimportant things in life.

With no football to report on, we have focused instead on two things. Firstly, the varying response to the virus around the world, from the leagues that have carried on (Belarus, page 20, and Nicaragua, page 24) to the extraordinary circumstances of Atalanta's Champions League game against Valencia (page 22).

> To borrow a phrase from Arrigo Sacchi, football is the most important of the unimportant things in life

Secondly, our Most Wanted feature (page 51) places the focus on the players who will be in most demand when football finally restarts. Transfer windows will inevitably take on different dates this year, and virus-wrecked club finances will undoubtedly impact on transfer fees, but talented footballers will remain at the heart of the game.

Over the coming months we will have an opportunity to reflect upon the shape and structure of the global game when we emerge from this crisis. Hopefully we will be able to provide some answers to the many pressing questions.

With the lockdown reducing our distribution at key travel points, airports and railway stations, copies of the magazine are harder to obtain. If you want to ensure your copy of *World Soccer*, please consider taking advantage of our latest subscription offer (page 8).

A final thought for the expensive lawyers who have sent this publication "cease-and-desist" letters regarding Russia and Qatar's World Cup bidding campaigns.

Their attempts to bully us into not reporting bribery claims will not be successful. We will continue to report on what will be remembered as one of the most sordid and unpleasant episodes in the history of our sport.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

USA

Warner "paid bribe by Russia" over 2018 World Cup

FIFAGate has returned to haunt FIFA and the run-up to the World Cup in Qatar after the United States Justice Department issued three new indictments and published new information on bribes allegedly paid to help Russia and Qatar land the 2018 and 2022 finals respectively.

The new details included an allegation that Jack Warner from Trinidad & Tobago was paid $5million to vote for Russia. Warner was then a senior national politician, powerful vice-president of FIFA and head of CONCACAF.

Allegations about attempts to buy votes had already been aired during the 2017 trial of Brazilian Jose Maria Marin and Paraguayan Juan Angel Napout, the only two men so far formally jailed in the US in a corruption investigation which exploded in May 2015.

New charges have been laid against former 21st Century Fox executives Hernan Lopez and Carlos Martinez. Their lawyers have denied the pair arranged payments to officials of South

"The SC maintains that it strictly adhered to all rules and regulations for the 2018/2022 FIFA World Cup bidding process and any claim to the contrary is baseless and will be fiercely contested"

Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy

Allegation...Jack Warner

American governing body CONMEBOL in a broadcast rights deal. Also charged are Gerard Romy, former CEO of the Spanish Imagina agency, and the Uruguayan sports marketing company Full Play Group.

More than 40 individuals and companies were initially indicted in 2015. Almost all pleaded guilty and 26 still await sentencing. Six have died in the meantime including, most recently, Rafael Callejas, the former state president of Honduras.

Keir Radnedge

New charges...Hernan Lopez

OBITUARY

Raddy Antic (1948-2020)

The only man to have coached Atletico Madrid, Real Madrid and Barcelona has died, aged 71.

Born in the former Yugoslavia, he played for Sloboda Uzice, Partizan Belgrade, Turkey's Fenerbahce and Spain's Zaragoza before joining England's Luton Town in 1980.

A midfielder, he scored 10 goals in 108 games, helping the Hatters to win promotion to Division One in the 1982 campaign.

However, it was his strike against Manchester City at the end of the following season that earned his hero status at Kenilworth Road. Luton were moments away from relegation before Antic scored with four minutes to go to seal a 1-0 victory and send manager David Pleat into a famous jig of delight across the pitch.

Antic won one cap for his country before retiring and launching a career in management with Zaragoza in 1988. Spells followed with Real Madrid, Oviedo, Atletico Madrid, Barcelona and Celta Vigo, and he won the league and cup double with Atletico in 1996.

He was later in charge of Serbia for two years, leading them into the 2010 World Cup finals, before heading to the Chinese Super League, where he had spells in charge of Shandong Luneng and Hebei China Fortune.

Hatter...he played over 100 games for Luton

World Cup... in charge of his national side

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Beckenbauer's reputation is in tatters

Franz Beckenbauer is the greatest German footballer of all time: captain and then coach of World Cup-winning teams in 1974 and 1990, creator of the attacking sweeper role and an international on 103 occasions.

He later put that reputation to triumphant service as leader of his country's bid to host the 2006 World Cup, and then as president of the organising committee of the finals.

But, like Icarus, he flew too close to the sun.

He was a compromised member of the corruption-scarred FIFA executive committee which awarded the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar. The wax melted, the wings dropped off, and "Der Kaiser" tumbled back down to earth.

In recent weeks Beckenbauer's shadow has clouded the legal skies over the Swiss Federal Court as it prepared to tackle a 2006 World Cup scandal involving four powerful figures in the international game, a mystery loan, a slush fund and a gala that never was. That was until the coronavirus brought proceedings to an abrupt halt and offered Theo Zwanziger, Horst R Schmidt, Wolfgang Niersbach and Urs Linsi innocent light at the end of their tunnel. A statute of limitation on such fraud cases expires on April 27 and there is no way this trial can conclude by then.

> Like Icarus, Beckenbauer flew too close to the sun. He was a compromised member of the corruption-scarred FIFA executive committee

This is far from the only FIFA-linked file in the purview of the Swiss courts. Around 24 further cases bobble along, most arising out of the 2018 and 2022 World Cup awards, and the future of them all is now in question – for reasons other than coronavirus.

The latest case was sparked by events during the 2006 World Cup bidding campaign. Along the way, Beckenbauer had floated the concept of a gala opening ceremony separate from the formal opening match.

Nothing more was heard of the idea until after Germany had won the ballot. Asked about the opening gala, Beckenbauer dismissed the project as having been judged too costly. And that was the end of the matter. Except it was not.

The 2006 finals were a huge success in which Beckenbauer, DFB president Zwanziger, general-secretary Schmidt, communications chief Niersbach and FIFA general-secretary Linsi could all bask.

Years later, in autumn 2015, a damning letter emerged from a dusty old DFB file. This revealed that in April 2000 Beckenbauer, on behalf of the bid committee, had obtained a loan of 10.3million Swiss francs from the French-Swiss businessman Robert Louis-Dreyfus. The latter was then CEO of Adidas, whose long-time ambassadors included Beckenbauer.

Niersbach claimed later that the monies had been needed to meet initial organisational costs and had been set against funds due from FIFA.

The German media suspected a slush fund, particularly when it alter emerged that a similar sum had ended up in the hands of Mohamed bin Hammam, the infamous but influential Asian president.

When Louis-Dreyfus demanded his money back it was repaid not directly by the DFB but by FIFA. Niersbach would excuse this as repayment of a cultural event subsidy originally assigned for that non-

Tarnished...Franz Beckenbauer

Impressive... World Cup opening ceremony in 2006

existent opening gala.

Other complexities arose. These included Beckenbauer's pay package and unexplained links with a betting company. These issues set the German taxman in hot pursuit of not only Beckenbauer but Zwanziger, Schmidt and Niersbach for what they knew or did not know about bid revenues.

On March 9, the Swiss Federal Court opened the fraud trial of Zwanziger, Schmidt, Niersbach and Linsi relating to the mysterious loan. Beckenbauer was not charged because of his frail health.

However the coronavirus outbreak left judge Sylvia Frei no option but to adjourn the trial indefinitely.

Meanwhile, Zwanziger, Niersbach and Schmidt must still contest tax evasion charges in Germany over their questionable bid committee accounting, while Beckenbauer sits reclusively at home in Austria with his reputation in tatters. WS

Al Khelaifi and PSG in the clear – again

Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City are continually being linked: mega-rich, big-spending, trophy-grabbing toys of soft-power-pursuing Gulf dynasties. But right now, PSG appear to be negotiating their way through a testing PR minefield somewhat more successfully than City.

Firstly, before coronavirus cut in, PSG were heading serenely towards a successful defence of their Ligue 1 title; City, by contrast, were 25 points adrift of Liverpool in the Premier League. Secondly, PSG had escaped the clutches of UEFA's financial fairplay police, while City copped for a two-season ban from Europe. And how City's appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport will play out in these insecure times, is anyone's guess of course.

One happy positive for PSG was the decision of the Swiss courts to quash a bribery charge levelled against their president, Nasser Al Khelaifi, for bribery over World Cup TV rights in his role as head of Qatar's BeIN Media.

The decision removed nagging questions about Al Khelaifi's right to sit on the UEFA executive committee as one of two delegates from the European Club Association, along with chair Andrea Agnelli.

The case concerned FIFA's award to BeIN Media of TV rights to the 2026 and 2030 World Cups for the Middle East and North Africa region – which is a region that has seen BeIN programming undermined by the Saudi-based BeoutQ pirates.

Free...Nasser Al Khelaifi

A key plank in the prosecution case was that Al Khelaifi had bribed Jerome Valcke, then FIFA secretary-general, with the rent-free provision of a luxury villa in Sardinia. However, a preliminary court hearing decided no connection existed between the rights award and the property deal.

FIFA had withdrawn its own complaint in January after reaching "an amicable agreement" in which Al Khelaifi agreed to pay FIFA's legal costs.

Valcke, who continues to challenge his 12-year FIFA ban in the courts, remains accused of corruption over a €1.25million payment from an unidentified businessman. But Al Khelaifi, as far as football is concerned, is now free as a bird.

Son of a gun

For years, people have been baffled by the date of birth for Ferenc Puskas.

But now the truth has been uncovered by Hungarian journalist Gyorgy Szollosi. For years Puskas referred to his birthday as having been April 2, 1927. In fact it was April 1. Also, his name was not Puskas but Purczeld.

In the mid-1930s many of the German Swabian minority in Hungary changed their names to Magyar style. Ferenc Purczeld senior was one of those. His wife Margit also decided to save her son from the embarrassment of having been born on April Fool's Day by insisting the birthday of Ferenc Purczeld-turned-Puskas was April 2.

Skipper...Puskas (left) leads out Hungary against England

Fans in Spain would later nickname him *Canoncito* ("little cannon"), which was ironic as the new name his father had adopted back in the 1930s means "gunman" or "rifleman".

"My first match for France was also his first match so we started and grew together. Michel was not a great tactician but a man who knew who he could trust and how to select the right players"

Michel Platini remembers Michel Hidalgo

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

EUROPE

HANSI FLICK agreed a deal to coach Bayern Munich until 2023. The 55-year-old – who was placed in interim charge in November and then given a permanent deal the following month until the end of the season – had won 18 of his 21 matches in charge as the side went four points clear at the top of the Bundesliga.

STEPHEN KENNY succeeded Mick McCarthy as manager of the Republic of Ireland. He had originally been set to take over after Euro 2020 but the postponement of the play-offs and the finals tournament itself accelerated FAI plans.

OUT

EUROPE

Former Arsenal players **ALEX SONG** and **JOHAN DJOUROU** were among nine players who were sacked by their club side Sion for refusing to agree to wage cuts during the indefinite suspension of the Swiss top flight.

Ex Chelsea and Nigeria midfielder **JOHN OBI MIKEL** left Turkish side Trabzonspor by mutual consent.

Italian coach **GIUSEPPE SANNINO** terminated his contract with Budapest Honved by mutual agreement.

Goodbye...Age Hareide has left Denmark

Hareide steps down as coach of Denmark

AGE HAREIDE stepped down as Denmark's national coach following the postponement of the European Championship finals until next year.

The Norwegian had been due to leave in July. He is set to be replaced by former Mainz boss Kasper Hjulmand.

ROB CHAKRAVERTY resigned as England's team doctor following revelations about his previous employment at UK Athletics and a controversy that involved the four-time Olympic gold medallist Mo Farah.

ASIA

ANTE MISE returned home to Croatia after his one-year contract to coach Turkmenistan was not renewed.

OBITUARIES

OPOKU AFRIYIE (1945-2020)
Scored twice as Ghana beat Uganda in the 1978 Africa Cup of Nations Final and was a sub when they won again four years later. Leading scorer in the Ghanaian top flight in 1979 and 1981 with Asante Kotoko, he joined Hearts of Oak at the end of his career, becoming one of the first players to play for the country's two most successful clubs.

PK BANERJEE (1936-2020)
Won a gold medal with India at the 1962 Asian Games, scoring the opening goal in the Final against South Korea, and captained his country at the 1960 Olympics, scoring in a 1-1 draw with France. Later coached the national team.

JOSE LUIS CAPON (1948-2020)
Played 269 games in nine seasons with Atletico Madrid, winning La Liga in 1973 and 1977, the Intercontinental Cup in 1974 and the 1976 Copa del Rey. A runner-up in the 1974 European Cup Final, which Atletico lost to Bayern Munich, the defender was also capped 13 times by Spain.

MICHEL HIDALGO (1933-2020)
As coach of France, from 1976 to 1984, he led *Les Bleus* to their first silverware when winning the 1984 Euros, having taken them to the World Cup semi-finals two years earlier. An attacking midfielder during his playing days for Le Havre, Reims and Monaco, he scored in the 1956 European Cup Final as Reims lost 4-3 to Real Madrid.

KWASI OWUSU (1945-2020)
Captained Ghana in the 1970 Africa Cup of Nations Final, which they lost 1-0 to the hosts Sudan. He was his country's all-time leading scorer with 36 goals until Asamoah Gyan broke his record.

First...Pape Diouf

Euro success... Michel Hidalgo

PAPE DIOUF (1951-2020)
Became the first black president of a major European football club when he took charge of Marseille. Born in Chad, his family moved back home to Senegal when he was a child before he emigrated to France at 17. He became president of OM in 2005 and during his four years at the helm they were French champions once and runners-up twice, as well as runners-up twice in the cup.

JOAQUIN PEIRO (1936-2020)
Ex Atletico Madrid, Torino, Internazionale and Roma forward who was a member of the Inter side that won the European Cup in 1965. He also lifted the Cup-winners Cup, with Atletico in 1962. Capped 12 times by Spain, he played at the 1962 and 1966 World Cups, and would later coach, among others, Atletico Madrid and Malaga.

LORENZO SANZ (1943-2020)
Real Madrid president from 1995 to 2000 during a period in which they won the Champions League twice. In 2006 he purchased Malaga before selling the club in 2010.

Ronaldinho

Brazilian held in Paraguayan prison

Saturday March 21 was not the 40th birthday that Ronaldinho had imagined. It would seem fair to assume that he'd been looking forward to spending the day with close friends and family, perhaps some other glamorous company, with a barbecue and music and dancing and life – and freedom, always freedom.

With a ball at his feet Ronaldinho illustrated maybe better than anyone else the liberating possibilities of football, the chance the sport opens up of joyful self-expression, of freeing the inner child.

And now the symbol of liberty is behind bars as he spent the landmark occasion in a Paraguayan prison.

The train of events is truly baffling. Ronaldinho had no need of a passport to visit Paraguay as his Brazilian ID card would have been enough. And he began his journey at Sao Paulo airport presenting his ID card. But on arrival in Paraguay he, and his older brother and manager Assis, did something different. They presented Paraguayan passports, documents which had been requested for two women and which had subsequently the details changed.

This set off a conflict within the Paraguayan authorities. Some may have been involved in the fraud, others appeared happy to let him do as he pleased so long as he posed for a selfie.

Others felt that a passport is a serious document and the country was running the risk of looking ridiculous – and it was this faction that won out, with the star placed under arrest while the case is investigated. And considered a flight risk he was kept in jail rather than under house arrest, playing in prison football tournaments, doing some carpentry and no doubt yearning for his freedom.

Were Ronaldinho and his brother really in the process of taking out Paraguayan citizenship? This usually requires a three-year period of residency and would entail surrendering his Brazilian nationality. Did the two passports really cost $6,000 each? And if so, who paid and why?

> That childish smile, once so infectious, now seems wholly inadequate to deal with the complexities of the world

These all seem like squalid little questions on the 40th birthday of one of the world's great entertainers. And through it all Ronaldinho seemed totally bemused – a point made by his own defence lawyer.

That childish smile, once so infectious, now seems wholly inadequate to deal with the complexities of the world. He seems trapped in a permanent state of "little brother-hood", with Assis making the decisions.

Maybe the Brazilian government will pull some strings. After all, the man who was caught using a doctored Paraguayan passport was just a few months ago named as an informal ambassador for Brazilian tourism.

Tim Vickery

Bemused... Ronaldinho

FOOTBALL CALENDAR RIPPED UP

Euro 2020 and Olympic Games delayed until next year

Coronavirus is no respecter of people, borders or calendars. This is the ultimate challenge for all football officials, whether at international, regional, national, league or local level.

The rush for easy money by jamming up the current calendar with a ragbag of competitions meant that, come the COVID-19 crisis, there was nowhere to run. There are no spare days or weeks or months in these short-sighted, entangled schedules.

UEFA and CONMEBOL presidents Aleksander Ceferin and Alejandro Dominguez have talked, optimistically, of the day when their international club competitions can resume. Ceferin understands that this is possible only when domestic seasons have been resurrected because instant income will be needed by all the clubs, both from TV and sponsors and through the turnstiles.

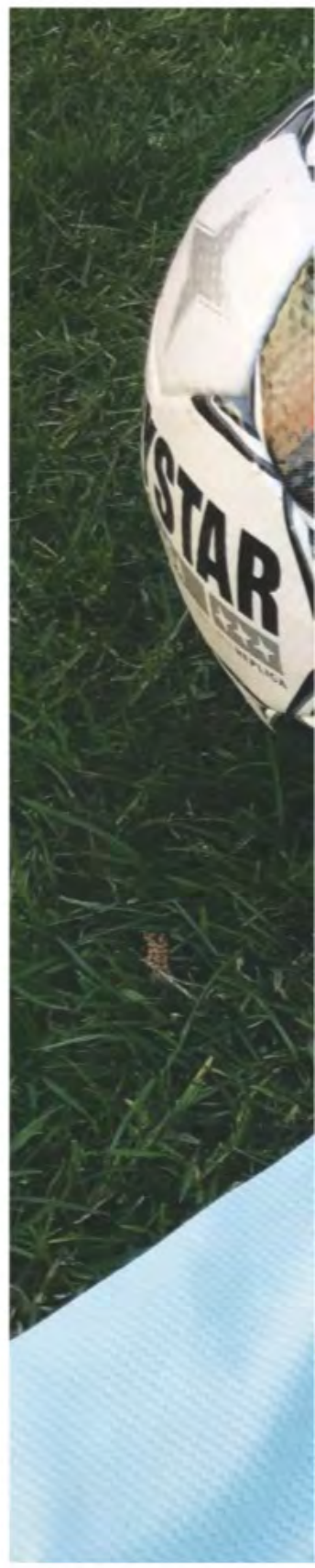
Most major football nations have seen gatherings of any size prohibited. Social and entertainment events have been cancelled. Local travel has been curtailed. Most international flights have been grounded and the airlines are going bust.

There is no end in sight. Jenny Harries, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, posited in late March that it could be six months before the UK returned to anything like normal. And while "social distancing" means no live crowds it also, presumably, rules out all forms of bodily contact sport.

So, tennis and golf would be OK. And maybe cricket. But football and rugby certainly not.

Stretch these doomsday forecasts across Europe and football's preferred resolution of completing the season will not be any time soon. As Kevin De Bruyne has cautioned, the longer the suspension the more time players will need to regain appropriate fitness levels. So, add in up to a further month.

World Cup qualifying ties have been postponed from Asia to South America. The Copa America and Euro 2020 have been pushed back a year to 2021. UEFA's eco-unfriendly, multi-venue championship was always a joke. Now it's a bad one. That was not Ceferin's fault. But he is the man landed with Michel



Shut...football grounds are set to remain no-go areas for quite some time

WORDS Keir Radnedge

Platini's poisoned legacy and he must see it through to the end.

Euro 2020 is a perfect example of the price the game is paying for extravagance and greed. The qualifying crossover with the Nations League – which was widely welcomed at the time – means that 16 teams are still to play out qualifying ties in indefinable time slots.

Different countries have been besieged by coronavirus at differing times and with differing impacts. How and when any of them may emerge from lockdown is impossible to calculate.

In Italy the first country markets reopened at the start of April, as did some garden centres in Germany. Simultaneously the United Kingdom was still at least one or two weeks away from the predicted peak of depredation. In England, scientists reported London as being "one week ahead" of the rest of the country.

In all of this, FIFA president Gianni Infantino, for all his sporting omnipotence, has been impotent. He has issued the appropriate messages about the priorities of public health and was probably relieved to kick into the long grass his widely derided plan for an expanded Club World Cup in China in 2021.

Unhappy...Ajax technical director Marc Overmars

UEFA has cancelled some but not all of its age-group tournaments. This is because several also act as qualifying events for FIFA's age-group world cups. No one knows whether these qualifiers can even be played in time to suit FIFA's own calendar. Meanwhile, Infantino has promised to conjure up a multimillion-dollar relief fund. How relieved he must be that FIFA possesses those vast cash reserves

on which he and his presidency rivals cast such scorn four years ago. Sepp Blatter and Jerome Valcke did not get everything wrong.

Coincidentally, FIFA's proposals include a season-ending extension of contracts. But that must depend on goodwill since it would probably be unenforceable in law. Also, as stated, no one knows what is meant by "the end of the season".

Further problems were created for UEFA by the International Olympic Committee's long-delayed but inevitable postponement of its Tokyo Games until July and August of next year. Any thought of running the 2021 Women's Euros straight after the men's finals was kicked out of the window. The Olympics is highly important for women's football so the two competitions cannot overlap or run back-to-back.

Also, since the Women's Euros is being staged in England it is impossible to push it back into the autumn when the Premier and Football League dream of filling their stadia again. That takes the knock-on effects of the pandemic into 2022.

Europe is not the world – although its football administrators often act as if it were – but it is by far the richest corner. It drives the international football economy and the longer it remains in lockdown the more extensively the worldwide game suffers.

Playing the blame game has no value as these are surreal times for individuals and organisations.

UEFA was content to go ahead with its congress in Amsterdam at the start of March, though subsequently the FA presidents of Serbia and Switzerland both contracted the virus. As Italy and Spain began to suffer so UEFA still went ahead with Champions League ties featuring Atalanta (v Valencia) and Atletico Madrid (v Liverpool).

But fear was setting in. UEFA followed several leagues in scrapping the pre-match handshake then postponed the Champions League returns featuring Manchester City v Real Madrid as well as Juventus v Lyon. Two Europa League matches between Spanish and Italian clubs were postponed because of the health controls and curtailing of flights, while Spain postponed La Liga for two weeks when Real Madrid's staff were quarantined after a coronavirus case in their basketball side.

Denmark, the Irish Republic and Holland called a halt to public sports events and the English Premier League was halted after Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta and three Bournemouth players were diagnosed.

UEFA summoned a series of video-conferences which postponed Euro 2020 as well as suspending the Champions and Europa Leagues. Four Champions League second-round ties remained uncompleted: Manchester City v Real Madrid, Juventus v Lyon, Barcelona v Napoli and Bayern Munich v Chelsea.

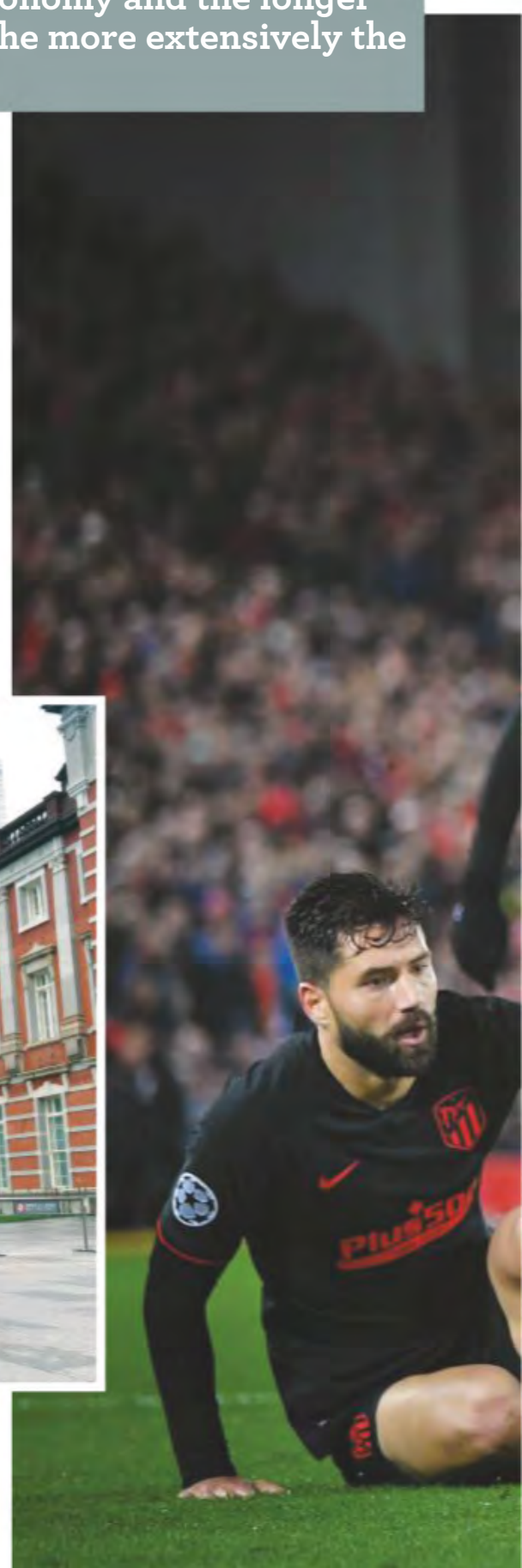
The Final in Istanbul on May 30 was postponed as well as the entry deadlines for next season's club competitions.

UEFA's strategy was creating summer space for national leagues to be completed once the pandemic had subsided, but that presupposed one size fitting all. Three Dutch clubs – Ajax, PSV and AZ – demanded that their league be declared at an end. Ajax technical director Marc Overmars said: "The league is dead. Life is more important."

The Belgian league went one step

Europe is not the world...but drives the international football economy and the longer it remains in lockdown the more extensively the worldwide game suffers

Restarted...the Olympic Games countdown clock in Tokyo



Isolated...Schalke players training in small groups

further by declaring Club Brugge as champions without bothering about the last matchday and the mini-league for European places.

That provoked a first sign of panic at Nyon. UEFA and the European Leagues organisation warned that the national associations risked seeing their clubs banned from club competitions if they halted domestic campaigns now. Really? Hard to imagine UEFA barring Real Madrid and Barcelona if Spain were to declare the 2019-20 season null and void.

An example of the confused responses to coronavirus was the storm which erupted in England over whether Premier clubs were justified in applying for government subsidies for the wages of non-playing staff. Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur, two of the world's richest clubs, ceded sympathy by not, at least, delaying such action.

When matches do restart, will they be behind closed doors? What happens if one player tests positive and everything is called off again? Completing the 2019-20 season could take up until December at that rate.

Football is at the mercy of events. To pretend otherwise is illogical at best, impractical at worst.

Different countries will emerge from the coronavirus tunnel at different times under different conditions.

UEFA's vision of a wondrous specific day when all Europe's teams walk back out together simultaneously is fanciful, to say the least. WS

Risk...Atletico Madrid (in black) played Liverpool in the Champions League

Belarus

PLAYING ON

The country where the game continued against the odds

As Europe's leagues ground to a halt or did not start at all due to the coronavirus pandemic, the new season in Belarus got under way to increasingly empty stadia – and global interest.

In the past, football in the former Soviet republic only attracted attention when perennial champions BATE Borisov made progress in Europe or during Diego Maradona's brief stint as Dinamo Brest president in 2018. But that all changed with COVID-19.

In December, Ukraine's Sport-1 became the first foreign TV company to cover games. Since then, matches have been screened in North Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia, with rights also sold to India, Israel, Lithuania and Russia.

This came about after Belarus' department of health opted to let individual sports decide whether to play on. And so football began as scheduled, on March 19, with supporters having their temperature taken before entering grounds but the fan zones in front of stadiums closed down.

> "It's better to die standing than to live on your knees"
> **Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko**

As the last European league still playing, matches attracted the world's media as the country's president, Alexander Lukashenko, downplayed the virus. "It's better to die standing than to live on your knees," he told local TV.

At least the clubs showed a little more concern. Before their game with Dinamo Brest on March 28, FC Slutsk said: "Given the epidemic situation, in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus it is necessary to sit in the stands during the match." Seats were also left empty either side of fans that did attend.

Gate revenue is usually negligible and TV money is traditionally distributed to the three main divisions, with the Premier League getting the bulk which is then split equally between clubs. But no one seems to know how much extra cash will now be available, with simply attracting attention being the main reason for playing on.

Precaution... fans have their temperature taken

"Most Belarusian clubs are looking for investors to come," says Victor Radkov, who is involved with business development at Minsk-based FC Smolevichi. "For most of the clubs it is the reason to survive."

Half of the clubs in the Belarus Premier League lose money according to UEFA and most sides are publicly funded. Only BATE, who are owned by Belarusian businessman Anatoli Kapski, and second-tier Krumkachy Minsk are privately owned.

Sponsorship is vital and the betting industry has a heavy presence. Cyprus-based gambling company Parimatch, which has a large exposure in many former Soviet states, is a Premier League sponsor. Parimatch is also the main sponsor of BATE, who won a dozen titles in a row before being unseated last year by Dynamo Brest, who are sponsored by Favbet. Elsewhere, Maxline sponsors FC Vitebesk, Neman Grodno and the second division but the Football Federation of

Defiant...fans (below and right) at Slutsk's City Stadium

WORDS Steve Menary

Belarus (BFF) denies that the decision to play on had anything to do with gambling or sponsorship.

BFF director of communication Dmitri Gerchov says: "We are not dealing with gamblers. We have Parimatch betting only as the sponsor of Super Cup and the partner of the federation. There are a lot of activities with them and they are not connecting with broadcasting.

"We are selling TV rights to the broadcasting companies that are willing to show our championship.

"The BFF is monitoring the situation not only on an everyday basis, but in a 24/7 format, constantly checking the news and keeping in contact with ministry of health.

"We are quite flexible and use all the technologies available to get the data that might influence our decision because safety and the health of people are our main priorities."

The first death in the country was confirmed at the end of March and discontent is rumbling. "I do hope that they will stop playing in the highest league and postpone our start [on April 18] but you never know," says Alex Vazhnik from Krumkachy Minsk.

When football does stop the game in Belarus may never get so much attention again. WS

Italy

THE MATCH THAT SPREAD THE VIRUS

Atalanta's Champions League game against Valencia in Milan may have had deadly consequences for the town of Bergamo

WORDS Paddy Agnew

"I'll tell you what I think. That game, Atalanta v Valencia at the San Siro, was a biological bomb. Forty thousand *Bergamaschi* all travelling together or at the same time to Milan, by bus, train or car..."

The speaker is Fabiano Di Marco, who is chief physician at the Papa Giovanni XXIII Hospital in Bergamo, northern Italy. In an interview with *Corriere Della Sera*, he confirmed an uncomfortable suspicion that the Atalanta-Valencia Champions League tie, on February 19 in Milan, may have been a major catalyst in spreading the COVID-19 virus in Italy.

On that joyous night, when 40,000 Atalanta fans headed to Milan – the club was playing its Champions League games at the San Siro because its own stadium in Bergamo is under renovation – nobody suspected that one month later 6,000 people would have died in Italy because of COVID-19. And none of those fans who wildly celebrated their side's 4-1 rout of the Spanish club that night could have imagined that within a month their town would be the epicentre of the epidemic.

Epidemic...a funeral in Seriate, near Bergamo in Lombardy

Unknowing...Atalanta followers at the game in Milan

In hindsight, Di Marco and other medical experts suspect that the game, the celebrations, the exchanges between the two sets of fans and, above all, the mass movement of 40,000 people from Bergamo to Milan offered the virus the perfect conditions in which to spread.

Nor was it just the 40,000 fans that travelled to Milan; there was also the many thousands more who remained in Bergamo that night, crowded around TV screens in restaurants, bars and homes to watch the game together.

Bergamo is a town of some 120,000 inhabitants so, in one way or another, at least half of the population came together to watch the game. In the process they may well have caused a huge spreading of the contagion.

The point here is that many of the fans, especially the younger ones, were probably asymptomatic carriers. In other words, they had the virus but did not know it because they were showing no symptoms. Worse still, after the match many of those supporters would have gone home to extended family units, some containing grandparents in the highest age-risk category.

Given that, on average, the incubation period is five to six days, followed by a 10-14 day period before the disease becomes critical, a COVID-19 infection will take approximately three weeks from the date of initial infection. Which might explain why three weeks after that first leg Champions League tie the epidemic had exploded in Bergamo, killing 330 people between March 8 and 16. By comparison, 23 people died in the same week the previous year.

This is not to say the entire COVID-19 epidemic in Bergamo was sparked by the Atalanta-Valencia tie. The mayor of Bergamo, Giorgio Gori, believes various other factors, including the town's ageing population and an infected hospital, were also key to the spread of the virus.

Furthermore, Gori pointed out that all the most logical analysis suggests the COVID-19 infection had probably arrived in the region of Lombardy in January, a month before the Atalanta-Valencia game. Clearly, the COVID-19 infection in Italy did not initiate with that Champions League tie, but Gori concedes it was likely that the game gave a major boost to the diffusion of the virus.

> "Atalanta v Valencia at the San Siro was a biological bomb. Forty thousand *Bergamaschi* all travelling together..."
>
> **Chief physician Fabiano Di Marco**

Gori also feels Italy has made many mistakes in its handling of the pandemic, largely because it was the first European country to be badly affected. Put simply, no one in Italy or Europe took the deadly disease seriously enough, thus allowing a mistake such as staging the tie in Milan.

However, in that context, Gori is perplexed that countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom failed to learn from Italy's mistakes, continuing to allow mass gathering events – such as a four-day horse-race meeting at Cheltenham which was attended by 250,000 people.

Yet even in Lombardy some people still do not seem to have learned much.

With Atalanta's bitter local rivals Brescia currently finding themselves struggling with coronavirus, some fans had the commendable idea of displaying a banner on a bridge bordering the provinces of Bergamo and Brescia to "unite" the two historic rivals.

The banner did not last long, however, with someone opting to tear it apart. WS

Unstoppable...Atalanta's Duvan Zapata causes problems for Valencia

Nicaragua

HOPING TO PLAY TO A FINISH

Games go on in the small Central American nation but fears are spreading with no sign of the country's president

WORDS Martin Del Palacio Langer

Within the American continent, Nicaragua was the only country to keep its league active in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The small Central American nation continued playing behind closed doors as the government argued that there were not enough infection cases to do stop the league. But in reality the story is more complicated.

"So far, only four cases have been reported," says Edder Mondragon, a Mexican defender with top-flight side Municipal Jalapa. "The Health Center [department] said it would only suspend the league when 50 cases have been reported, but so far it has not happened."

In reality it's practically impossible to know for sure how many cases there are as Nicaragua is the only country in the Americas that doesn't have preventive measures in place, nor has it established any type of alert or restrictions to try to stop the pandemic.

"The FA and this government are not going to stop the league," explains Mondragon. "A month ago we did go into quarantine but we kept playing.

"In the cities the necessary measures were taken. They closed shops, bars and restaurants, but then reopened them because they said there was no problem. Also, people don't have money and they have to go to work to live."

The opposition in the country has accused the government, led by Daniel Ortega since 2007, of falsifying data, banning the use of gloves and masks in hospitals, and promoting mass events with large crowds. A group of opposition politicians and health experts have even presented a parallel

Wait...Diriangen before kick-off

Closed doors...Managua (in blue) and Diriangen line up before a top-of-the-table clash

Leaders...Managua's Mike Cruz heads home

plan to deal with the COVID-19 crisis because they claim the government is leading the country to a catastrophe.

It has to be said that for the last two years Nicaragua has been in a deep socio-political crisis. A popular uprising against Ortega has left hundreds of prisoners, thousands of wounded and tens of thousands in exile.

The situation has been made even stranger because Ortega has not appeared in public or on television since March 12, which has sparked all kinds of speculation about his whereabouts in Nicaraguan society. The rumours range from his absence being a political strategy to avoid scrutiny to speculation that he could have died of coronavirus and that the regime is hiding it.

While all of this is going on, the league continues uninterrupted. And although some players and teams have called for a stoppage it was not for the reason that one might think, according to Mondragon.

"There are teams here that have wanted to stop the league," he reveals. "Players who don't want to play but who say that their teams force them. In my team we have not wanted it to stop, truth be told. We were in the relegation places and if it were suspended then we would go down. And, at the same time, the teams that were safe at the time wanted it to stop, to ensure their safety.

"Now that we are out of danger it is the other teams who don't want the league to stop."

Everything seems to indicate that the Liga Primera de Nicaragua will continue until its conclusion, which was primed to be an exciting affair. With four games to go, Managua were top of the table, three points ahead of Real Esteli and Diriangen.

And although the stadiums are closed to the public, the lack of football around the world has meant that, for the first and perhaps only time, this tournament climax will be news for media and fans around the world – which is an unusual situation in a country which is usually far from the big headlines and in which baseball is the most popular sport. WS

> "They closed shops, bars and restaurants, but then reopened them because they said there was no problem"
> **Edder Mondragon**

Safety first..Gremio players take no chances ahead of the game against Sao Luiz

FOOTBALL TAKES A BACKSEAT

With matches cancelled, the continent faces a period of great upheaval with worries over money and climate adding to an uncertain future

WORDS Tim Vickery

The Copa Libertadores certainly went out with a bang. The last match before the coronavirus suspension was Brazil's fiercest derby, the Porto Alegre clash between Gremio and Internacional. There were no goals, but there were eight sendings off, and earlier that evening the competition itself was shown the red card.

When the suspension was announced the immediate reaction of some was that it was an overreaction. Opinions, however, changed quickly.

There had not been a spare seat in the house when Gremio hosted Internacional on the Thursday, and all had seemed completely normal. But when Gremio took the field again three days later it was for a game taking place behind closed doors and with the team playing under protest. Gremio lined up for the team photo wearing masks to make the point that, as players, they were being exposed to unnecessary risks. Within a couple of

days almost all professional football on the continent had stopped.

By now it was clear that the opening two rounds of World Cup qualification scheduled for the end of March could not go ahead. This was obvious because the continent's best players are based in Europe, which at that point was bearing the brunt of the problem. It was felt that either the players returning from Europe might bring the virus with them or, with countries closing their borders to affected zones, European-based players might not be able to get back across the Atlantic.

And this also applied to the Copa America, due to be staged in Argentina and Colombia in June and July. The tournament has been put back to next year, with the World Cup qualifiers pencilled in for the start of September.

The oldest continental competition in the world, the Copa America has already felt the effects of a pandemic. The third version of the competition was set for Brazil in 1918 before "Spanish Flu" hit, even killing Brazil's president elect Rodrigues Alves, and the tournament was put back to 1919 – when Brazil won their first major title.

Field hospital... Pacaembu Stadium in Sao Paulo, Brazil

CONMEBOL initially hoped that this year's Libertadores could resume on May 5, but at the very minimum that would require the 10 South American nations to have reopened their borders. And at a practical level, some of the main stadiums around the continent are being transformed into field hospitals in an attempt to take some of the strain off precarious health systems.

> "This is just the start of a crisis for an uncertain duration against an unprecedented opponent who moves with extreme speed"
>
> **CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez**

"This is just the start of a crisis for an uncertain duration, against an unprecedented opponent who moves with extreme speed," says CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez. "We have no idea if this match will end in normal time, extra time or penalties.

"We should be ready and prepared to work as a team. It's the most important game of our lives and there is no rush to start playing again."

Such serenity is in part based on economic considerations. Announcing record receipts of $509million for 2019, up from $227m the previous year, Dominguez added: "With the house in order and the finances solid we can take on this pandemic with confidence."

Some $65m – which is 60 per cent of the total participation money for the group phase – has already been distributed to clubs in the Libertadores and the Copa Sudamericana.

Indeed, club finances have now become a major issue.

Unlike in Europe there is no great question of what to do with unfinished championships as South America largely follows the calendar year. A bigger problem is ensuring the sustainability of the football industry, especially those clubs not involved in continental competition. The early signs are many players are more reluctant to take salary cuts than their European counterparts.

There would seem to be two explanations. One is that many top-flight players in South America hardly earn a fortune. When Carlos Tevez of Boca Juniors suggested players could go a few months without being paid, midfielder Emiliano Mendez of Arsenal de Sarandi was quick to slap him down, saying: "It's a lie. You can't put us all in the same boat because it's not true."

Suspended... Independiente del Valle's Angelo Preciado (left) and Leandro Martinez of Ecuador's Barcelona in the Libertadores

Another possible reason is the depth of mistrust that can exist between South American clubs and their players, with late and unpaid wages hardly uncommon in South America. Sergio Marchi of the Argentinian players union has expressed a fear that some teams "are looking for excuses and mitigating circumstances to cover up bad management and mistakes made when drawing up the budget".

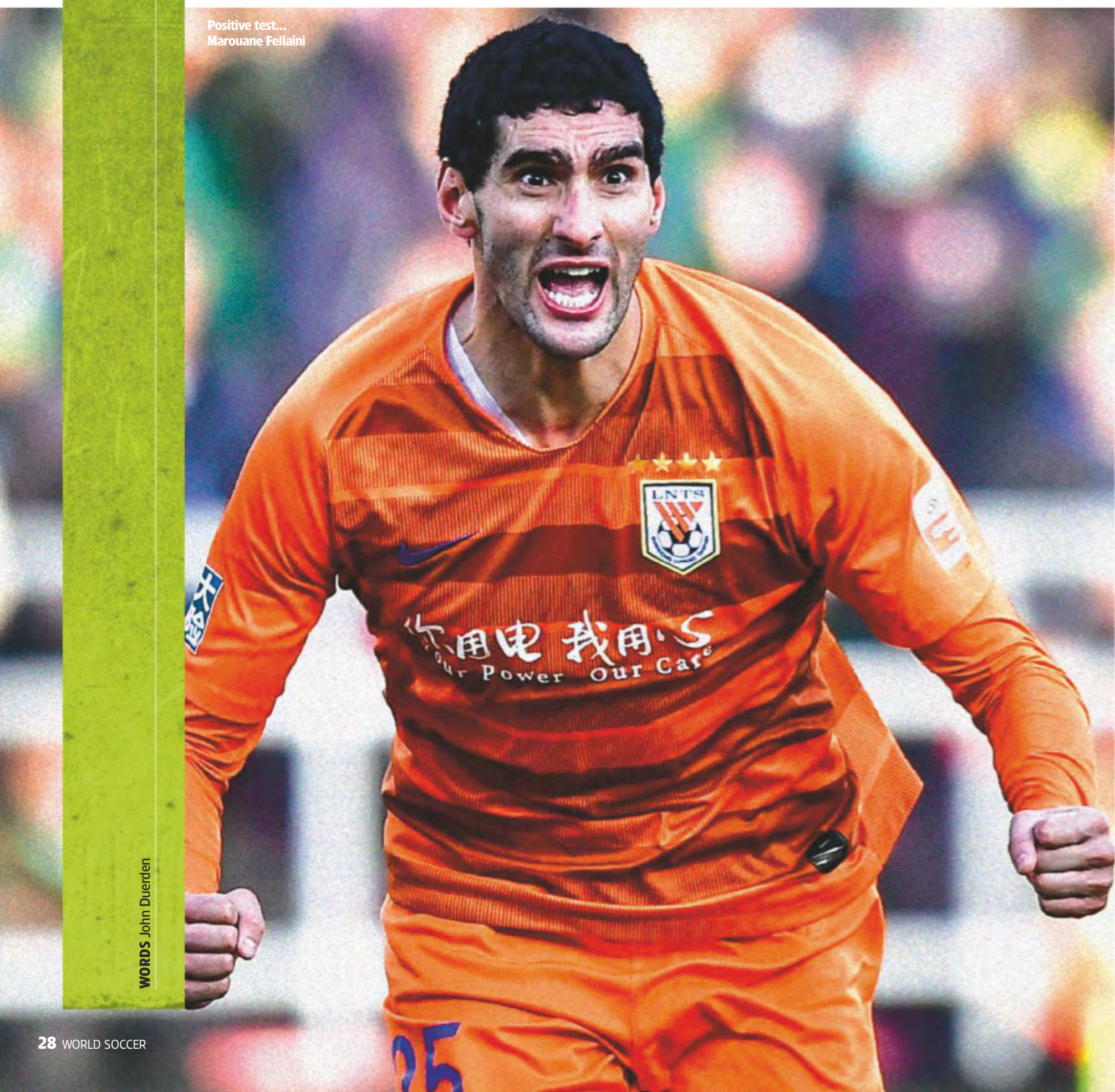
There is a further complicating factor with the onset of winter as it appears the coronavirus spreads easier in cold conditions. Temperatures can drop sharply in the south of the continent from June to August, so if the virus is not under control by mid-May the stoppage could roll on until September.

For the time being, sports channels around the continent are showing famous matches from history. Here, South American football is truly blessed.

The future may look uncertain, but there is plenty of time to wallow in its glorious past. WS

WORKING ON THE RESTART

Leagues nervously eye a return to action



Positive test... Marouane Fellaini

WORDS John Duerden

J.League first... Gotoku Sakai

The East Asian football scene was the first to be affected by the coronavirus outbreak and it is the first to start seriously thinking about when, and how, to get back on the pitch.

China, South Korea and Japan first postponed games in February and were all hopeful of starting in May, but it is touch and go whether that will happen.

The Chinese Super League was scheduled to start on February 22 and there were rumours of a planned April 18 return, but that always seemed optimistic. By the end of March, however, all 16 top-tier teams were back in the country, going through the mandatory 14-day quarantine period and preparing to start serious training. That said, it was only the Chinese players that were back – around 50 foreign players and coaches were still overseas after being allowed to return to their home countries.

The April restart was definitely out of the window when it emerged on March 22 that one of these, Marouane Fellaini, had become the first in the league to test positive.

The Belgian had scored all of Shandong Luneng's goals in four pre-season games in Dubai and then returned to his homeland before travelling to Morocco and the Maldives. Catching a flight from Singapore to Shanghai, he then took a train north to Jinan, where he was placed in quarantine and then tested.

With the number of cases in China falling after the outbreak started in December, it seemed to confirm fears that a second wave of infections could come from people entering the country from overseas. With China announcing that foreigners would not be allowed to enter the country from March 28, all the top-tier clubs were frantically trying to get their stars back before the ban was put in place.

That was easier said than done. Brazil to China is a trek at the best of times, but with aircraft being grounded and governments tightening travel restrictions it started to look almost impossible. Shanghai SIPG chartered a plane to bring back Oscar, Hulk and Ricardo Lopes from Brazil and they arrived with just 11 minutes to spare, but Marko Arnautovic did not make it.

Clubs have been trying to get special permission for their players to return but it remains to be seen if such efforts prove successful. And it is not only players. Tianjin Teda coach Uli Stielike couldn't return because a member of his household in Germany had tested positive, so he was self-isolating for two weeks and could not catch a plane. He still faces another 14 days when he eventually returns to the Chinese port city. "This is the worst," said the German.

Back...Shanghai SIPG chartered a plane for Hulk (left) and Oscar

There has been much debate about a restart but no date has been set. While cities around the country slowly start to return to something approaching normal, football officials are desperate not to start too soon and are scared of helping a second wave of infections spread. On March 31 the General Administration for Sport said that there would be no sport in the "'near future". And when it does come, empty stadiums are likely.

Privately, Chinese officials say they would be happy to see South Korea start first, while Seoul would rather Beijing did.

Korea has been working hard to keep the virus under control and, from a practical point of view, seems close to a restart. But taking the step emotionally is tricky, especially with a public that is growing increasingly tired of the battle against coronavirus.

After years of falling attendances, last season saw K-League crowds actually start to climb. To get the timing wrong would be a public-relations disaster and a late March meeting did not give a date for the start of a season that was due to kick off on February 29. It was agreed, however, that the campaign will be shorter than usual, perhaps reduced from 38 to 27 games.

> Chinese officials say they would be happy to see South Korea start first; Seoul would rather Beijing did

Japan actually managed to play the first game of the season in February with Vissel Kobe asking spectators not to sing, jump around or wave flags. The league was soon postponed, first to April 3 and then to May 9, with talk of no away fans and home fans having empty seats on all four sides.

But cases were rising by the end of March and the Olympics were postponed. On March 30, Vissel Kobe's Gotoku Sakai became the first player from the J.League to test positive. Four days later, league chairman Mitsuru Murai admitted that it would be difficult to start in May.

June now looks to be the earliest restart date but nobody really knows. WS

A-LEAGUE LOSES BATTLE

Bid to finish regular season behind closed doors eventually becomes impossible

"Mission complicated became mission impossible" were the words of new Football Federation Australia (FFA) CEO James Johnson as he rather belatedly brought the curtain down on the A-League.

Complicated it certainly was. But mindful of a fragile relationship with a broadcaster that has made little secret of the fact it would like to rid itself of a contract worth $57million per year to the game, the A-League, unlike many others, had vowed to plough on.

With only a handful of games left of the regular season the clubs and FFA – so often at loggerheads – were singing from the same hymn sheet in believing that they could fulfil their contractual obligations and get the season done.

However, the increasingly restrictive measures implemented by governments in both Australia and New Zealand would eventually scupper those plans.

Initially the competition opted to play behind closed doors and move fixtures to midweek dates to condense the final part of the campaign into just a few weeks.

But that race against the clock was complicated by governmental decisions to impose quarantine periods on those travelling in and out of Australia – and, crucially, New Zealand.

This legislation was already in effect in New Zealand by the time Wellington Phoenix hosted Melbourne Victory on March 13, and from then on the New Zealand side knew the only way they could complete a promising campaign would be to decamp to Australia and stay there.

Phoenix's players and staff faced a tough dilemma: commit to spending six weeks – maybe even longer – away from home, or stay with family. And in the case of midfielder Ulises Davila the choice was even starker as his wife had just given birth to his first child back in Mexico.

In the end, Phoenix opted to move to Australia and rocked up at the Sydney Academy of Sport in Narrabeen on March 18 to start their first of two weeks in enforced quarantine.

Victory's players also had to serve a fortnight's self-isolation, with striker Ola Toivonen taking to social media to express his anger that the players had been unaware of the impending measures. The Swede was backed up by the Professional Footballers Australia union boss, John Didulica, who claimed he'd been given assurances by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that the quarantine imposition would not happen.

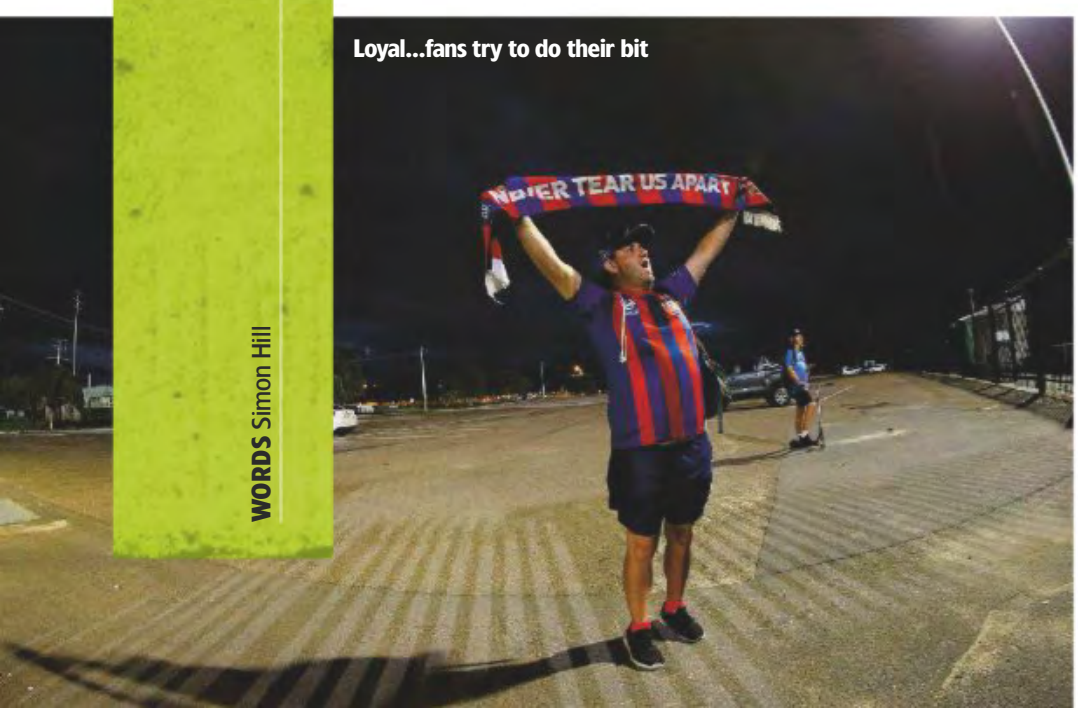
Locked out...Brisbane Roar players acknowledge a handful of fans who stood outside the stadium for their game against Newcastle Jets

Although Victory and Phoenix were ruled out for two weeks, in the end their absence proved immaterial as only four more games were completed, including the derby between Western Sydney Wanderers and Sydney FC.

This fixture was played in front of a full house of 28,500 at the same venue last October. On March 21, the stands were empty as they played out a 1-1 draw. The only consolation was that many football-starved fans around the planet tuned in for what was billed the "biggest game of football in the world tonight".

Forty-eight hours later Newcastle Jets beat Melbourne City 2-1, with Steven Ugarkovic scoring a cracking winner, but by then the reality of the situation had dawned on everyone.

Further travel restrictions between



Loyal...fans try to do their bit

WORDS Simon Hill

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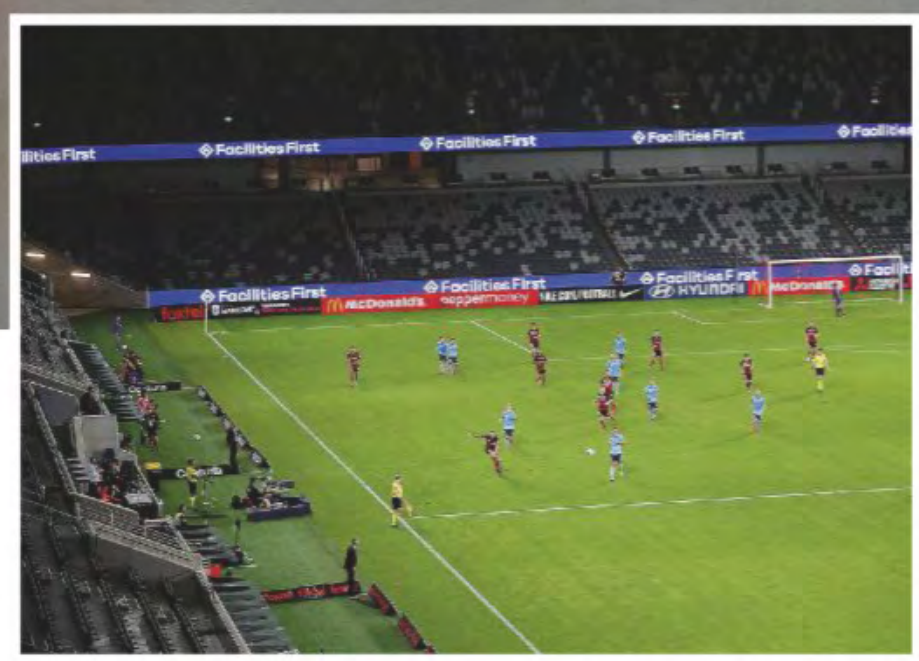


Game on...Sydney (in blue) versus Western Sydney Wanderers

Australian states made any continuation impossible and Johnson confirmed the inevitable at a press conference in Sydney the next day.

FFA has been careful in the language it has used regarding the shutdown, labelling it a "suspension" with a reassessment promised on April 22, but in the current climate it's difficult to envisage any sport being ready to resume by then.

In the interim the federation and the clubs must deal with the financial fallout of a massive loss in revenue. With the independence of the A-League still not finalised, and TV ratings having plummeted on the back of a three-year civil war, coronavirus could not have arrived at a worse time.

With the league technically in breach of its TV deal, albeit through no fault of its own, Johnson's administrative skills will be put to the test in keeping both broadcasters and the football community fully onside – which will be no easy task.

The game in Australia is no stranger to adversity and in the last 50 years it has come through a three-year FIFA ban, the collapse of the National Soccer League (the forerunner of the A-League) and, more recently, the governance war that was as long as it was bitter between the protagonists. It has survived them all, but to come through this latest challenge will require unity of purpose – which is not exactly its strong point.

However, at a moment in time where the football community is pleading for a plan to take the game forward, the enforced break does at least offer a chance to reset.

Football in Australia must use the time wisely. Its future depends upon it. WS

The derby between Western Sydney Wanderers and Sydney FC was billed as the "biggest game of football in the world tonight"

eye witness

Patrick Keddie reports

GREECE

Super League civil war

When PAOK played host to fellow title contenders Olympiakos in February, a drone hovered above the Toumba Stadium while down in the stands the home fans raised a guttural wall of noise and lit an inferno of flares. Hundreds of police were at the ready for trouble.

The game itself was a largely drab affair, with Olympiakos claiming a vital 1-0 victory, but the seething spectacle was an appropriate backdrop for what has become Greek football's most explosive rivalry in recent years.

PAOK of Thessaloniki versus Olympiakos from the Athens port of Piraeus is north Greece versus south Greece, second city versus capital, emerging power versus ▸

Red-hot rivalry...PAOK fans light flares during February's clash with Olympiakos (in blue)

ΚΑΝΑΤΕ
ΚΟΛΟΜΒΙΑ
ΓΡΑΨΕΙ
HOOLIGANS
ΦΟΛΑΣΕ
ΠΑΝΙ
ONTRA
URNITURE

Committed...PAOK's Sverrir Ingi Ingason (left)

routine champions. PAOK won the title last year for the first time since 1985 and the pair were way ahead in the table this season before the Greek Super League was suspended in March.

Both clubs are led by controversial oligarchs who are bitter rivals in business, politics and the media as well as football, while the teams share a long-standing and growing enmity.

However, a particularly virulent dispute between the sides during the latest campaign has threatened to implode the whole of Greek football.

> "The government makes statements but they are aware that they can't actually compete with the power of the club presidents"
>
> **Sports journalist Alexandros Kottis**

In December 2019 a report by a TV channel owned by Olympiakos president Evangelos Marinakis accused PAOK's owner Ivan Savvidis of violating ownership rules by illegally acquiring a stake in another Super League club, Xanthi, allegedly through a Cypriot offshore company controlled by one of his relatives. Savvidis denied the allegations but, in January, Greece's independent sporting commission ruled that PAOK should be relegated.

That move triggered a massive outcry. While PAOK fans took to the streets and threatened violence against government officials, the club accused Olympiakos of trying to win the championship by having them demoted. European Parliament MP Theodoros Zagorakis – the former PAOK midfielder and president who captained the Greek national team to an unlikely victory at Euro 2004 – was expelled by the ruling New Democracy party after he threatened to quit if PAOK were relegated.

The government, finding itself caught in an uncomfortable place between two powerful feuding presidents and two furious sets of fans, swiftly passed new ownership legislation to block the relegation, but said PAOK would probably face a hefty points deduction. This triggered further fury among Olympiakos supporters, while PAOK's fans continued to accuse the government of siding with Olympiakos.

Protest...PAOK fans take to the streets of Thessaloniki

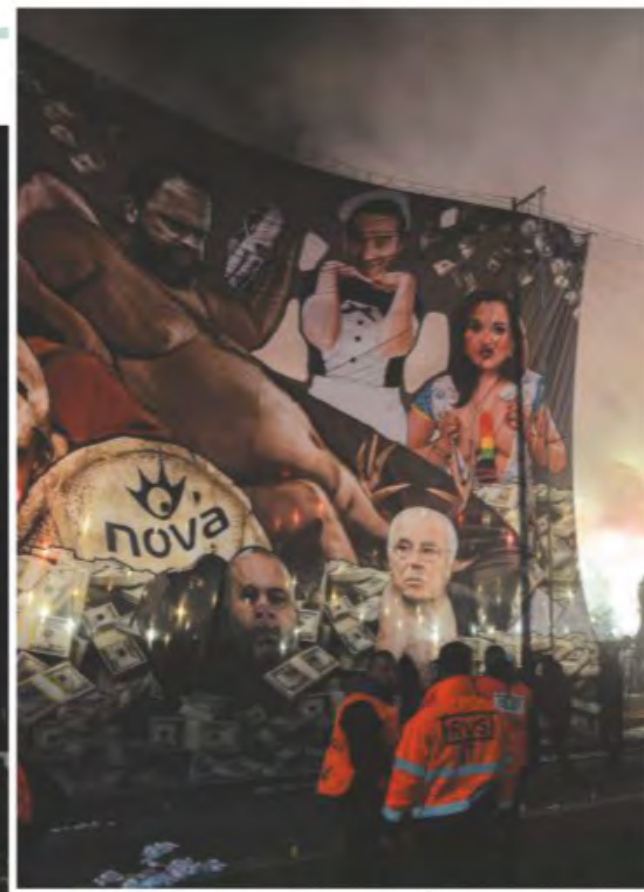
With the expression "football civil war" becoming commonplace in the Greek media, the country's prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis threatened to suspend the league and sought emergency talks with UEFA and FIFA to reform a much troubled domestic game which has long struggled with hooliganism; allegations of corruption, match fixing and doping; political machinations; Machiavellian antics

by club owners; parlous finances; and violence against referees.

In a late February meeting in Athens with UEFA, the Greek government signed a rather vague "memorandum" – a loaded term used to describe bailout agreements during the worst years of Greece's debt crisis. UEFA agreed to produce a report within three months on ways to improve the governance of Greek football.

"We've taken a political decision to clean up Greek football for good and we are very much looking to your assistance in proceeding down that path," Mitsotakis

Help...UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin (far right) with Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis



Message...PAOK fans make their feelings known (below and right)

told UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin, while also warning that clubs could be expelled from the top flight if reforms are not complied with.

But Nikos Syriodis, a journalist, argues that many governments have tried to reform Greek football and all have failed. "The owners are only looking out for their own interests," says Syriodis. "Greek football has been sick for decades."

Powerful businessmen have long been attracted to Greek clubs, particularly the big four of AEK Athens, Olympiakos, Panathinaikos and PAOK – and especially since Greek football was professionalised in the late 1970s. But Greece's economic crisis has created opportunities over the past decade or so for an evolving breed of oligarch to tighten the nexus between football, business and politics.

Becoming a successful president of a Greek club comes with an army of fanatical fans, which can help to protect the owner against unfavourable political decisions or even prosecutions, and can help them advance their interests and influence beyond the sport.

> "The owners are only looking out for their own interests. Greek football has been sick for decades"
>
> **Journalist Nikos Syriodis**

Shipping magnate and media tycoon Marinakis became the owner and president of Olympiakos in 2010 and the club won successive league titles in the first seven years of his ownership. Over the years he acquired several media outlets and leveraged the club's fanatical support to enter politics. In 2014 he became a councillor in Piraeus and his sidekick Yiannis Moralis, Olympiakos' vice-president, became mayor.

In recent years PAOK have emerged as serious challengers to Olympiakos – and therefore Marinakis' supremacy – and the hostilities have exploded.

PAOK's revival from a long period of mediocrity and financial crisis started in 2012 when the Greek-Russian billionaire Savvidis, who is also a shipping magnate and media baron, bought and invested heavily in the struggling club, using his subsequent success and popularity to buy up huge swathes of assets in Thessaloniki, including hotels, real estate, more media outlets and a share of the lucrative port.

Savvidis was close to the left-wing Syriza party, who were in power from 2015 to 2019, while Marinakis supports the centre-right government of New

Democracy that assumed office in July 2019. Marinakis was also best man at the wedding of prime minister Mitsotakis' sister, who is godmother to his son.

The oligarch owners have clashed repeatedly in recent years in a proxy war fought through media mouthpieces over footballing disputes, squabbles over assets, and accusations of political and sporting favouritism and match fixing.

Several figures at the Greek Football Federation (HFF) have faced corruption charges over the years and Marinakis, who bought Nottingham Forest in 2017, has faced several match-fixing and various organised-crime charges since 2011. Marinakis vehemently denied all the allegations, which he says were politically motivated, and all charges have now been either dismissed or dropped.

With battles in the courts and the political sphere frequently overshadowing action on the pitch, FIFA and UEFA intervened in October 2016, with FIFA effectively running the HFF through a normalisation committee until elections in 2017 for a new president and executive board. An independent sports commission and refereeing body overseen by UEFA was established, and foreign referees were flown in to officiate big matches and derbies.

The Syriza government passed legislation aimed at expanding its ability to impose disciplinary measures over football clubs and it suspended the league several times due to violent incidents, while also docking points and frequently banning fans en masse for infractions. But it did nothing to challenge the power of the oligarch presidents and little to quell the problems.

While PAOK had previously accused the HFF of being controlled by Marinakis, the FIFA-directed drive for reform led Olympiakos to claim a new federation president was supported by Savvidis.

In February 2018 a crunch match between PAOK and Olympiakos was abandoned before kick-off after Olympiakos' then coach, Oscar Garcia, was struck by a cashier roll thrown from the stands. Later that season Savvidis was banned from all matches for a year after he stormed onto the pitch while armed with a holstered gun to confront the referee during a match between PAOK and AEK.

The Greek Super League has now lost its automatic Champions League qualification spot and the national team has slipped to 54th in FIFA's world rankings, down from 12th in 2014. However, the league has become more competitive in recent seasons and Olympiakos embarked on a good run in Europe this season, eliminating Arsenal from the Europa League.

Powerful...Olympiakos president Evangelos Marinakis

Armed...PAOK owner Ivan Savvidis

A new play-off structure was introduced this term whereby the top six teams carry their points forward from the regular season and then play each other in a mini-league designed to make more derbies between the big teams.

But this campaign also further underscored the intractable nature of the Greek game's problems. Referees threatened to strike in January 2020 after attacks on officials and their homes, and then the dispute over Savvidis' alleged ownership of Xanthi ratcheted up the tension to another level.

Seriously reforming Greek football is likely to mean breaking the stranglehold that the oligarchs wield over clubs and regulating the way clubs are run, says sports journalist Alexandros Kottis, who maintains: "The government makes statements but they are aware that they can't actually compete with the power of the club presidents.

"They don't want to create too many fights with these guys who are also [powerful] media owners...the Greek government, even if it's New Democracy or Syriza, right or left, are not strong enough do this."

Football journalist Aleka Zoumi agrees and thinks the government is only talking about reforms for show, stating "The memorandum signed with FIFA and UEFA will not bring any real results."

The case against PAOK is now back in the courts, with the point deductions yet to be confirmed, while the league is now suspended indefinitely due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, from which Marinakis has recently recovered after testing positive in March.

In the meantime, few seem to believe that Greek football can so easily be nursed back to health. WS

Title race...PAOK's Diego Biseswar takes on Ruben Semedo (left) and Omar Elabdellaoui

eyewitness

Joel Richards reports

ARGENTINA

Tevez takes title

Boca crowned champions before shutdown

"It is the biggest game in our history," runs the Argentinian FA campaign. "And we need to win."

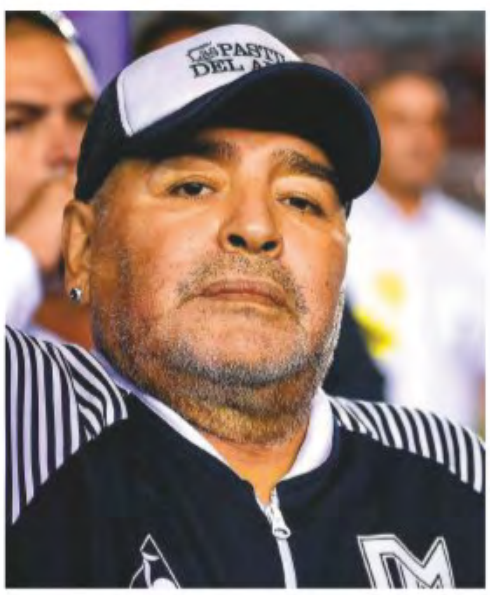
Amid the slightly laboured football analogy imploring people not to go out – "if you leave home you'll be caught offside and hurt the team" – was the simple message of unity in a time of crisis. Star players appeared in another video saying: "There are no colours, we have to wear the same shirt."

Carlos Tevez no doubt had similar good intentions when he said players were not the most affected by the coronavirus pandemic. "Footballers can go six months, or a year, without being paid," claimed the Boca Juniors captain. "We are not in the same desperate situation as kids who live day to day."

Tevez grew up in an impoverished neighbourhood and knows first-hand the social and economic reality of many people in his country. Yet his comments sparked controversy among his fellow players. Most do not earn the wages he is on at Boca, nor indeed have they enjoyed successful and lucrative moves to Europe.

"Many players are in the same situation as any other worker who can't make ends meet if he's not paid," said Luis Angel Salmon, a charismatic lower-league journeyman striker in his late 30s, who curiously had a short spell at the same club as Tevez in China.

Diego Maradona, who is coach of Gimnasia de La Plata, offered his contract and wages up for review. But he warned not all players can go so long without pay and he believes some club directors are using the situation to avoid paying players, arguing: "It seems some clubs have always had a pandemic."



Argument...Diego Maradona accused directors

Clubs in Argentina already faced a juggling act to balance the books, with rampant inflation and currency controls, before the suspension of all activities due to the coronavirus outbreak. TV money is secured for April, but after that it is unclear where finance will come from.

The coronavirus pandemic reached South America late. Argentina registered its first case in early March, several months after the outbreak in China, and it has suffered relatively few deaths. The country went into full national lockdown on March 20 and Argentina president Alberto Fernandez, recently declared an honorary club member at Argentinos Juniors for his birthday present, admits: "I don't know when football will return. May seems the worst month for it." As winter nears in the southern hemisphere, Argentina expects the spike in cases in the coming months.

> Tevez's goal against Gimnasia secured Boca's title. It was his 200th appearance and 10th title with the club

Racing Club de Avellaneda and Talleres de Cordoba, were among the first top-flight clubs to announce a reduction in players' wages in order to pay club employees.

Clubs are now debating how football will continue after lockdown. The immediate task at hand is resuming the second phase of the 2019-2020 season – the Copa Superliga, a separate competition and title in itself.

Meanwhile the first phase, the Superliga, ended in dramatic fashion.

In mid-February, with two games to go, River Plate appeared set to win the only piece of silverware missing from Marcelo Gallardo's personal trophy cabinet. Since taking over at the Monumental in 2014, he has lead River to an astonishing period of success, winning continental trophies and defeating Boca Juniors in high-octane clashes – not least the Copa Libertadores Final of 2018. But he had yet to win the Argentinian league.

Another win...Tevez (centre) celebrates

And so it remains. River stumbled and took just two points from the last six available. Boca took all six and won the first title in the new era.

Club presidential elections at Boca last December saw Jorge Ameal win, and with him Juan Roman Riquelme returned to the club as sporting director. The former playmaker's first decision was to bring 2007 Libertadores-winning coach Miguel Angel Russo back to the club.

Russo replaced Gustavo Alfaro, whose conservative approach had riled senior players. On Russo's return the side drew 0-0 and then won all six remaining games. He shifted the team's formation

and approach, with the result that the defence conceded one goal in seven games, and the attack struck 16 times.

While Eduardo Salvio was the highest scorer in the season sprint finish, it was a rejuvenated Tevez who led the line. His star had shone dimmer in recent months and there were questions over his future. And while River were failing to beat Atletico Tucuman in the north of the country, in Buenos Aires it was Tevez's goal against Gimnasia that secured the title. It was another personal milestone for the forward – his 200th appearance and his 10th title with the club.

While it remains unclear when the Copa Superliga will resume, some club directors see a chance to change an already complicated league structure. WS

Missing out...Marcelo Gallardo consoles Lucas Martinez Quarta

PETER GULACSI

"My dream as a young boy was always to play in a big league in front of big crowds"

RB Leipzig's former Liverpool keeper is now rated one of the best in the Bundesliga

Can RB Leipzig end the long reign of Bayern Munich as Bundesliga champions?
The way we played against Bayern [0-0 away], the strongest team in Germany, should give us courage. We are doing well and we are a young side, a hungry side. Experience is important in football but it's not everything. It's always a question of small details, about moments of magic or mistakes. We have to minimise our mistakes and use our talent, but it's all open – and that is really great after Bayern dominating for so many years. It is exciting for fans.

Many pundits say you are currently the best goalkeeper in the Bundesliga. How do you react to that?
My dream as a young boy was always to play in a big league in front of big crowds and to belong to a club where I am really appreciated. It wasn't focused on one particular club. My big goal was to be an important player and I am very happy that, in Leipzig, I have found this club. I came up from the second division with Leipzig and I have had to make steps in my career, to keep improving along with the team. People started to recognise me last season really and I am very glad if I am mentioned among the best keepers. That's a big compliment when you think of other keepers like Manuel Neuer or Yann Sommer.

What impact has your coach, Julian Nagelsmann, had at Leipzig?
He's a very young but talented coach. He had already showed his skills and his philosophy at Hoffenheim. He saved them from relegation and transformed them into a top-four team in the Bundesliga. His ideas are really exciting for the players. The big target is to reduce the gap between us and the top teams like Bayern, and so far we have done that. His philosophy is a bit different. He wants a lot of control with the ball, not just pressing and working against the ball. With this mix, if we find the right balance we can be really successful.

Does that make him a mixture of Jurgen Klopp and Pep Guardiola?
Yeah, we can say that, of course. We want to keep the pressing and the counter-pressing, which had already made us successful and become a style of RB. But he was brought in to give that extra which can transform us into a top team. If we look at Liverpool's improvement, throughout the years they became a lot better with the ball because you have to have control over the game. It's not enough just to press, press, press and when you lose the ball press again. You have to control the ball. I think Klopp has stabilised Liverpool in that way in the past 18 months. They have a lot more ball possession.

Are you a footballing keeper like Alisson at Liverpool and Ederson at Manchester City?
I had to adapt to the new style. Last year we were a lot more direct but now we try to play out more. I am more involved in the game and so far it has been working really well. I think I am comfortable with the ball at my feet. We are more flexible in formations with Nagelsmann, changing during matches. He reads the game really well and can find details that can make us successful.

You began your career as a teenager at Liverpool. How was that experience?
I have very good memories. I went at the age of 17 and the first three years went as planned. The coaches, led by Rafa Benitez, really paid attention to my development; they were planning step by step how I could reach the level of the first team and be the number one for the club. Unfortunately, after Rafa left there were many changes at the club with Roy Hodgson, Kenny Dalglish and Brendan Rodgers. They are all fantastic managers, but at that time, because the club was not doing that well, they had other priorities. For a young player it is a difficult situation but one you have to accept and understand. That's why I decided I needed a change and had go somewhere else to be a number one keeper.

Did you ever play at Anfield?
I was on the bench 52 times for Liverpool but I never made a competitive appearance for the team. The only time I played at Anfield was in the testimonial game of Steven Gerrard. On one hand I regret I didn't get the opportunity at Liverpool, but on the other that's what triggered my move to Salzburg and then Leipzig. I am very happy where I am now.

Interview by Jim Holden

RB LEIPZIG

11

FAST TRACK TO THE TOP

WORDS Nick Bidwell

The RB Leipzig and Germany striker is one of the hottest properties in Europe at the moment

Dateline: Autumn 2009. A curly haired, 13-year-old striker by the name of Timo Werner, then on the books of VfB Stuttgart, nervously reels off his particulars in a video presentation, hopping from one foot to the other as he recites his "Me, Myself, I".

As media platforms go, this was strictly home-movie fare. But what a difference a decade makes, with Werner only featuring in blockbusters these days, conspicuously top of the bill in the role of goal-hungry RB Leipzig striker, established Germany international and one of the hottest properties playing in Europe today.

That Liverpool, Chelsea, Bayern Munich, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Juventus and Internazionale rate him so highly makes perfect sense. Thanks to an advantageous contractual release clause, he would "only" cost

€60million and is a man of many parts: one of the speediest players in the world, able to play through the middle or out wide on the left, boasting an extraordinary aptitude for converting chances – 27 goals in all competitions for RB this season – and increasingly adept in the assist department.

You can trust "TurboTimo" in more or less all red-zone circumstances. Having only turned 24 in March, he is the gunslinger who is quicker on the draw than his shadow. Nor is he merely a sprinter cum finisher. He is technically strong, robust and has plenty of game awareness to boot.

Werner has a long history of dealing with headhunters. During his rookie season as a Stuttgart first-teamer – he was just 17 years and four months old when making his debut for the club in a Europa League tie against Botev Plovdiv in August 2013 – he was already on the radar of Real Madrid, Barcelona, Borussia Dortmund and Bayer Leverkusen, while German giants Bayern Munich had been seriously scouting him for even longer, regularly checking out his performances for Stuttgart's youth sides.

Honour...he won the Fritz Walter Medal in 2013 for Germany's best under-17

> "VfB is my club. I've been here since I was little...I want to carry on learning and am happy to do that here"
>
> **On resisting the lure of Bayern Munich**

Bayern sporting director at the time, and a connoisseur of football talent with the highest standards, Matthias Sammer was determined to bring him in. And he very much fancied his chances of doing so, only for the teenager to dig in his heels and insist on remaining with Stuttgart, signing his first professional contract with VfB on his 18th birthday in March 2014.

Werner's desire to stay put was as logical as it was emotional. A first-teamer for just nine months, he rightly concluded that, with his apprenticeship far from complete, continuity was his best course of action. He was a VfB fan too, born in the same Stuttgart district, Bad Canstatt, as the club's Mercedes-Benz Arena. The ties that bound were tight as he had been with VfB since he was six, joining them in 2002 from the little-league ranks of local outfit TSV Steinhaldenfeld.

"VfB is my club," he explained at the time. "I've been here since I was little.

"I've come through all the different age categories and feel really comfortable here. I want to carry on learning and am happy to do that here."

For those with their finger on the pulse of German football, Werner's rise to the upper echelons was no real surprise. Growing up he was the golden child turned platinum youth, an elite stripling who could not help but be noticed. On the Stuttgart nursery slopes he was the one who never lost his balance, contributing a goal a game (24 in all) as the under-17s clinched the German title in 2012 and netting no fewer than 24 goals for the under-18s the following season.

Fan...he supported Stuttgart as a boy

Frieder Schrof, who was head of youth development at VfB for three decades before retiring last year, painted a telling anecdotal picture in a piece in *Kicker* magazine, revealing: "Every weekend the youth department at VfB would produce internal bulletins on the performances of our various teams. Next to Timo's name there invariably would be a three, a four or a six in brackets.

"Even as a little boy he was the one who scored the most goals."

Werner was also a pillar of German representative sides, proving especially productive for the under-17s, with 16 goals in 18 appearances, and the under-19s, nine goals in 11 games.

In an unforgettable 2012-13 season he was such a valuable commodity to the German federation that he played for both the under-17s and under-19s. It was an incredible campaign in every way, with the youngster piling up 43 goals in 41 games in all competitions for club

National set-up...(back row, circled) with the German under-15 squad in November 2010

and country. His reward for such sterling efforts was the best-in-class rosette in the national under-17 player of the year category. The runner-up in that 2013 poll was Julian Brandt, now an attacking star for Dortmund and Germany.

"Timo has extraordinary ability," gushed then Stuttgart director of sport Fredi Bobic. "He has the directness, the nose for goal opportunities, speed and great finishing." And his boss with the German under-17s, Stefan Boger, agreed: "Timo is a natural taker of chances, is good athletically and is tremendously quick."

It was undoubtedly Werner's good fortune to learn his chops at Stuttgart. The Swabians in white-and-red have an excellent tradition for cutting in-house gems and it's no coincidence that the current Germany squad contains no fewer than three VfB academy graduates: Werner plus the Bayern duo of winger Serge Gnabry and full-back cum midfielder Joshua Kimmich.

Werner and Kimmich have known each other since their early teens. They went to the same high school in Stuttgart, Wirtemberg-Gymnasium, and remain the best of friends.

"Timo always has had lots of goals in him," said Kimmich at a German national team press conference just before the last World Cup. "Playing alongside him, I never had an instance when he did not end up the top scorer in a championship or tournament. He's an absolute weapon."

Super sub...set to be released from the bench

In the 2013 close season the initial Stuttgart plan was to not rush things with the then 17-year-old and let him concentrate on his final year of high school and only deploy him with the under-19s. Yet somehow, some way, the programme never was implemented. Werner was too exciting a prospect to be denied, definitively convincing coach Bruno Labbadia with a late supersub goal – with his weaker left foot – in a friendly win against Turkish club Belediyespor in late July.

On a baking hot afternoon in the southern German city of Friedrichshafen this was the moment his career well and truly received its launch code. No wonder his father Gunther, watching in the stands, jumped up in delight. Here was the ice-breaker: his son's first senior team goal and pro ticket to ride.

"Timo had been dreaming of this goal," his dad would later tell reporters. "I'm so pleased for him."

A string of first-team appointments duly followed: a Europa League start versus Botev Plovdiv; an end-of-match cameo against Dynamo Berlin in the DFB Cup; then his Bundesliga debut, coming on as a late substitute in a 1-0 home loss to Leverkusen and in doing so becoming VfB's youngest-ever German top-flight player at 17 years and 164 days.

"I would have picked him for the team when he was 16 if league statures had allowed it," said Labbadia.

Remarkably poised and fearless for one so young, he continued to catch the eye. In September 2013 he started his first Bundesliga game for Stuttgart, marking the occasion with two assists in a 6-2 thumping of Hoffenheim. Three weeks later, he opened his top-flight goalscoring account, heading in the

Flying...his career really took off after moving to RB Leipzig

equaliser in a 1-1 draw at home to Eintracht Frankfurt. Usually lining up on the left wing but with licence to drift in at every opportunity, he looked every inch the *wunderkind*. Not bad for a schoolboy who took the bus to training.

Early in November he further cranked up the publicity machine with a brace in a 3-1 win at local south-west rivals Freiburg. Both his goals were sterling solo efforts, with defenders left flummoxed and helpless as he put his hurricane pace, quick feet and deadly finishing touch to explosive use. The first 17-year-old to score two goals in a single Bundesliga game he had the air of a "made in Germany" Lionel Messi.

The reaction of some of his team-mates and the Stuttgart hierarchy to his Freiburg masterclass was interesting to say the least.

Coach Thomas Schneider, who had taken over from Labbadia, limited himself to just one short and sharp comment – "the boy has tremendous speed" – while fellow Stuttgart striker Vedad Ibisevic appeared to admonish the youngster for not passing prior to firing in his second goal.

Keeping Werner's feet firmly on the ground was the order of the day. Hence the post-match decision to select him for a spot of heavy lifting, ordering him to help carry the kit hampers to the bus.

In the media, though, it was an altogether different story. Tales of precocious feats sell and up and down the country, and the pundit community were in a frenzy. Not least the former Bayern

> "Maybe he'll be at the [2014] World Cup...other countries simply do not have such players"
>
> **Mehmet Scholl**

Future star...celebrating a goal against Portugal for Germany's under-15s

Timeline

NOV 9, 2010
Scores a hat-trick on his debut for Germany under-15s in a 5-1 win against Poland.

MAY 16, 2012
Scores his spot-kick as Germany lose to Holland on penalties in the Euro Under-17 Final.

AUG 1, 2013
Appears against Botev Plovdiv in the Europa League and becomes Stuttgart's youngest-ever player, at 17 years, four months and 25 days.

AUG 17, 2013
Plays in the Bundesliga for the first time, in a 1-0 loss at home to Bayer Leverkusen.

Debut...beating Gary Cahill of England

Munich and Germany playmaker Mehmet Scholl, who intimated that the youngster was already in the national-team waiting room. "Maybe he'll be at the World Cup [Brazil 2014] next year," declared Scholl on the ARD network. "Other countries simply do not have such players."

Scholl's prediction would prove wide of the mark as *Bundestrainer* Joachim Low was never likely to drag such a raw, inexperienced youngster away from his exams. But who could blame Scholl for getting carried away with the hyperbole. The kid was special.

As far as senior national-team honours were concerned he would have to be patient and was forced to wait until March 2017 for this particular rite of passage, winning his first cap in a 1-0 friendly win over England in Dortmund in March 2017. The reasons it took so long to make the breakthrough are straightforward enough: he was still a little wet behind the ears and inconsistent; the hype was a tremendous burden, with too much expected of him; and in all his three years in the Stuttgart first team the club were perennial strugglers, eventually falling through the Bundesliga relegation trapdoor in the spring of 2016.

Against such a dysfunctional backdrop, it was hardly shocking that he found it difficult to play to his potential.

Moving to RB Leipzig in the summer of 2016 – joining them in a €10m deal – was the best possible outcome for Werner. He was the snuggest of fits for the extraordinarily ambitious *Leipziger*. Not only was he young, vibrant, versatile and self-possessed, his turf-devouring speed was made to measure for RB's quick transition style.

"Timo is so quick he can turn off the light in his room and be in his bed before it turns dark," joked RB coach/director of sport Ralf Rangnick.

Werner's opening gambit with RB, in 2016-17, proved to be one of glorious vindication. He scored 21 top-flight goals that campaign to end up as the best German finisher in the Bundesliga and had the satisfaction of playing a vital role in RB's first-ever Champions League qualification, via the runners-up spot in the league. He also finally broke into the national team set-up.

He could do no wrong, and just to cap a wonderful phase he delivered the goods in his country's triumph at the Confederations Cup in Russia, where he scored three goals and made two others. Germany would not have won the tournament without him. The Golden

Winner...with the Confederations Cup in 2017

SEP 22, 2013
Becomes Stuttgart's youngest-ever scorer with a goal against Eintracht Frankfurt.

NOV 10, 2013
Scores twice in a 3-1 win over Freiburg to become the youngest player to get a Bundesliga double.

JUN 11, 2016
Agrees a four-year contract with RB Leipzig, who pay a club record €10m for him.

SEP 26, 2016
At 20 years and 203 days he becomes the youngest player to appear in 100 Bundesliga games.

MAR 22, 2017
Makes his international debut, as a substitute against England.

Boot he picked up, receiving the award from Diego Maradona no less, was thoroughly deserved.

Werner, who appeared in all three of Germany's matches in their disastrous World Cup 2018 campaign, is exactly what Low looks for in an attacker: the goals, the substantial deep threat, the rip-roaring pace, the comfort in high-tempo matchplay. Yet he still has some way to go to nail down an automatic place in the starting XI. Low has a weakness for "false strikers" and has toyed with using winger Gnabry in such a role.

Given his flair for goals – 88 for RB Leipzig in the last four seasons – and the transfer-market fever he generates, it is rather surprising that his popularity levels in Germany are not the most flattering. Like all RB players he has to contend with the fact that large swathes of the German football public cannot abide the Leipzig outfit, regarding the whole Red Bull operation as a money-grabbing exercise. In this black-or-white world, RB Leipzig are looked at as mercenaries, as agents of an anti-tradition agenda. This is the cross Werner and his team-mates must bear.

> "I've had a lot of abuse and still scored my goals. I've zoned it out and carried on playing my game"
>
> **Facing up to criticism**

Golden Boot... receiving his award from Diego Maradona

In terms of fair play and PR, he has let himself down on occasion, notably when clearly diving for a penalty in RB's 2-1 Bundesliga win over Schalke in December 2016. Werner, who himself converted the resulting spot-kick, claimed at first that he had not conned the referee into believing that Schalke goalkeeper Ralf Fahrmann had brought him down. The following day, he confessed and apologised, but the damage was done.

For months on end he was the nation's favourite felon, whistled and jeered wherever he went. He even came in for a hotter-than-hell reception from fans of the national side, who jeered him when coming on as a substitute in a World Cup tie against San Marino in Nuremberg in June 2017.

"All I could do was to swallow it and hope that time would heal the wounds," he told *Kicker*. "One thing I can say: I've learnt my lesson from this business. I will be stronger for it going forward.

"I've had a lot of abuse and still scored my goals. I've zoned it out and carried on playing my game."

He faced an entirely different type of problem during RB's Champions League face-off with Besiktas of Turkey in the autumn of 2017. Visibly discomforted by the sonic boom noise of the Istanbul crowd he asked to be withdrawn after only 30 minutes. Apparently he had been suffering with vertigo.

"I've never known such an atmosphere in my life," he explained after a 2-0 defeat for the *Roten Bullen*. "I could not focus on the match. I asked for some earplugs and it did not help either. I still don't feel well."

Just as well then that he is so single-minded and grounded. Frieder Schrof, Stuttgart's youth-system guru, knows the striker as well as anyone and only has praise for his attitude and enthusiasm for his craft, telling *Stuttgarter Zeitung* newspaper: "Timo always shows good character and mentality. You see it when he goes hunting for the ball. For him, there's no such thing as too many sprints or a run which is too long.

"He's been a professional for six years and often people forget that he needs more time to develop into an established pro. Sometimes his youthful friskiness can come to the surface and he has to control that."

Happy to describe Werner as a "decent, well-behaved boy who is results orientated", Schrof attributes much of the youngster's success to his mother, Sabine Werner, and her now estranged husband, Gunther Schuh.

Schrof calls the pair "down to earth and sensible" and makes no secret of his belief that Werner is cut from the same cloth. His parents certainly did a good job. Keen for him to have an academic

Reputation...going to ground against Schalke

JUN 25, 2017

Scores his first senior goals for his country, with two against Cameroon in the Confederations Cup.

JUN 17, 2018

Plays in the World Cup for the first time as Germany lose 1-0 to Mexico.

NOV 23, 2019

Becomes the youngest player to make 200 Bundesliga appearances.

Noise...he had to come off in the Besiktas game

back-up plan, they insisted that he complete his high-school studies and it's thanks to their influence that he has turned into a rather low-key superstar. No fancy haircuts or tattoos, no massive social-media presence, just a preference for a quiet life with his girlfriend Paula.

Even when combining with first-team stardom at Stuttgart back in 2013-14 he refused to let it go to his head, making a point of not signing autographs. "Because I'm just a normal schoolkid," he said.

He is very much a chip of the old block. His father Gunther was no mean footballer himself, a professional/semi-pro in the German regional leagues and second tier with Ludwigsburg and Stuttgarter Kickers. He used to play on the right wing and naturally had plenty of advice for his offspring.

"When I was little, he used to play football with me," recalled Werner in the *Schwarzwalder Bote* daily. "I'd never stop shooting at goal. From the word go we worked on my shooting technique, first with my right foot, then with the left."

Those fun-packed sessions have paid off. Genes + practice + instinct = industrial quantities of goals. **WS**

Timo Werner *the numbers game*

GERMANY

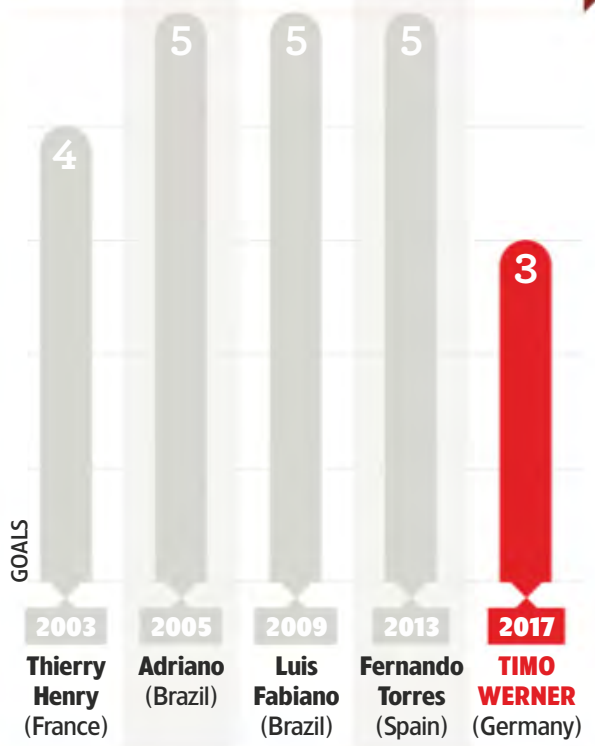
29
CAPS

11
GOALS

BUNDESLIGA'S BEST YOUNGSTER

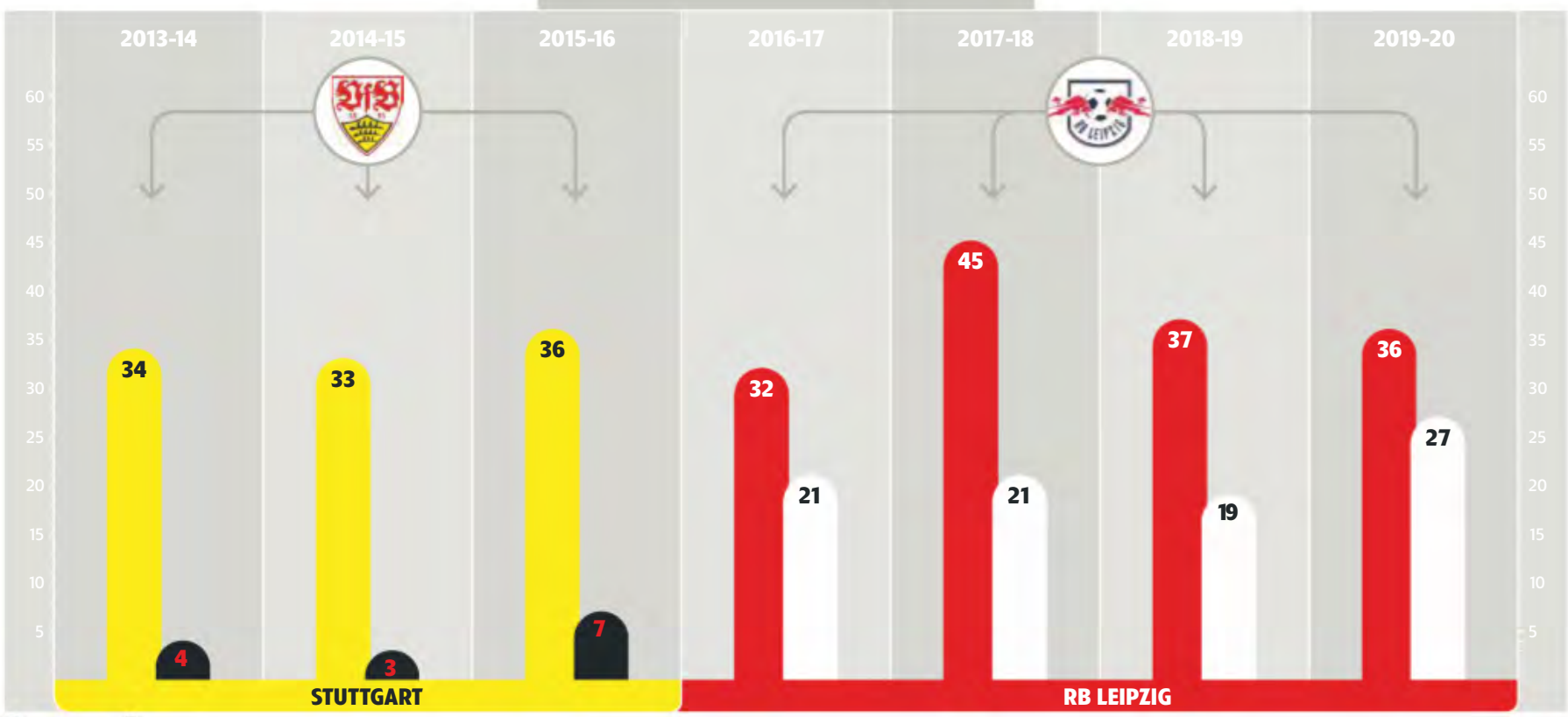
2013			
UNDER-19	Matthias Ginter	(Freiburg)
UNDER-18	Kevin Akpoguma	(Hoffenheim)
UNDER-17	TIMO WERNER	(Stuttgart)

CONFEDERATIONS CUP GOLDEN BOOT



2019-20 BUNDESLIGA PLAYER OF MONTH

August: ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	September: AMINE HARIT (Schalke)	October: SERGE GNABRY (Bayern Munich)
November: TIMO WERNER (RB Leipzig)	December: TIMO WERNER (RB Leipzig)	
January: ERLING HAALAND (Borussia Dortmund)	February: JADON SANCHO (Borussia Dortmund)	



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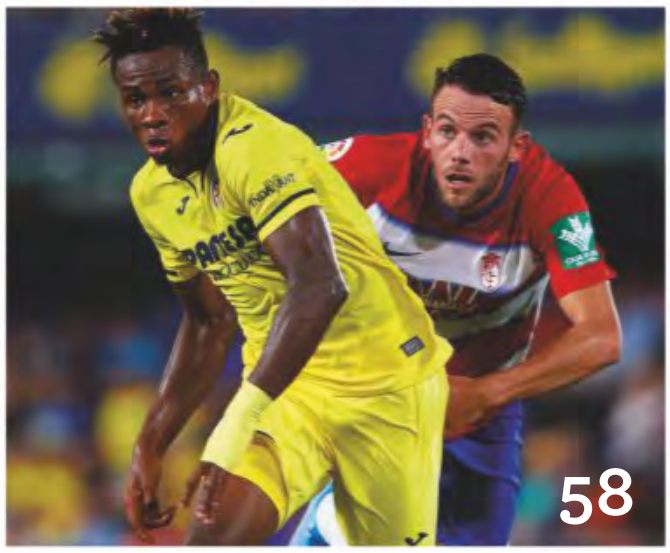

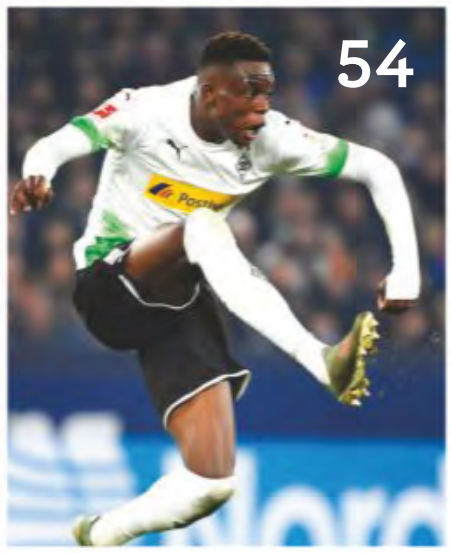

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JADON SANCHO

(Borussia Dortmund)
No one should be under any illusion. The English winger is probably the biggest attacking draw in the Bundesliga. Quick, inventive, imaginative and full of goals, a nine-figure transfer fee could see him leave the Ruhr.

KYLIAN MBAPPE

(Paris Saint-Germain)
PSG will move heaven and earth to keep the 21-year-old at the Parc des Princes. But there is one major snag – he has his heart set on a move to Real Madrid, who would certainly welcome him with open arms.

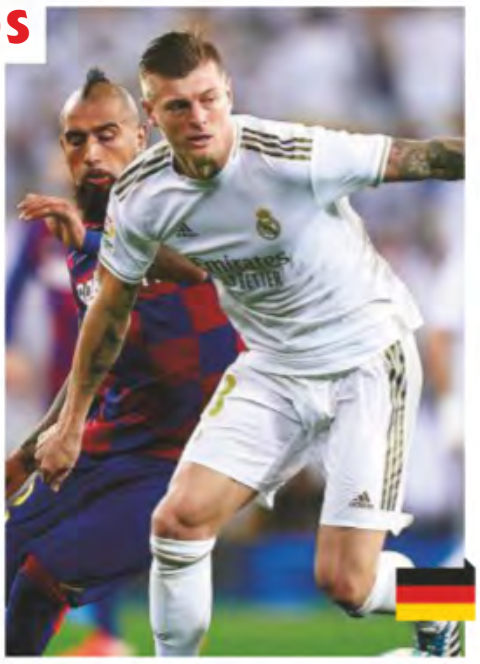
KAI HAVERTZ

(Bayer Leverkusen)
It has been suggested in some quarters that Leverkusen are demanding a whopping €130m for their much in-demand attacking midfield prince. Contrary to received wisdom, Bayern Munich are not his preferred destination.

GIANLUIGI DONNARUMMA

(Milan)
Mino Raiola, the super-agent representative of the 21-year-old keeper, is not having to drum up interest in his client; it's happening as a matter of course, with the likes of Chelsea, Real Madrid and PSG on his trail.

TONI KROOS

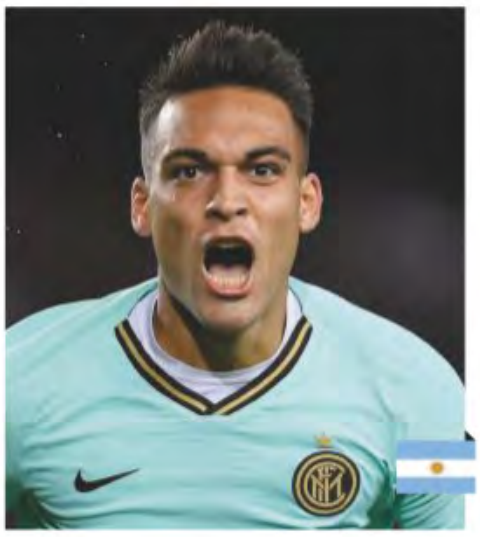


(Real Madrid)
Although the German remains one of the best linkers and thinkers in world football, there have been signs this spring that his glorious six-year cycle at Real is coming to an end as he was left out of the starting XI in the Champions League at home to Manchester City.

DONNY VAN DE BEEK

(Ajax)
After playing a prominent role in his side's march to the semi-finals of last season's Champions League, the midfielder's marketability his gone through the roof. Dutch sources say Real, Ajax and the player have a deal in place.

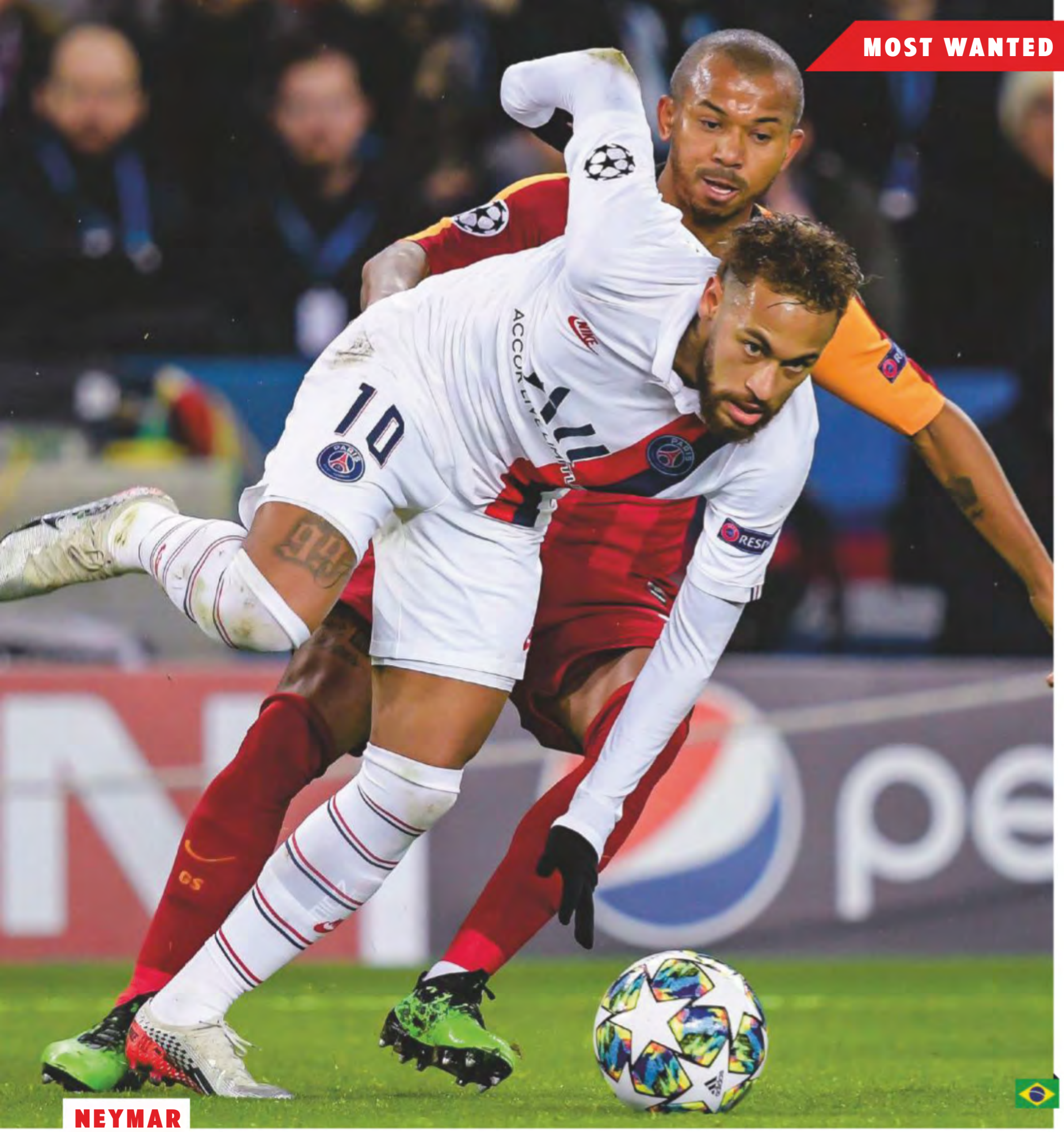
LAUTARO MARTINEZ



(Internazionale)
The little Argentinian striker has been a man on a goalscoring mission for the *Nerazzurri* this season and is now thought to be a Barcelona target. A penalty-area predator, he is two-footed, opportunistic and explosive.

SERGEJ MILINKOVIC-SAVIC

(Lazio)
While producing a Man of the Match performance in Lazio's 3-1 victory over Juventus in December, his house was burgled. Should he move on – maybe to Internazionale or perhaps a leading Premier League side – his €70m price tag would be a steal.



NEYMAR

(Paris Saint-Germain)

For a good two years the Brazilian has been driven by twin obsessions: to break free from what he sees as his PSG chains and rejoin Barcelona, where he starred from 2013 to 2017.

Will it eventually happen? Well, on the face of it, the 28-year-old has good reason to be optimistic.

Barca main man Lionel Messi and several other first-team senators continue to vociferously lobby for his return, while the consensus in the *Blaugrana* corridors of power is that his return would be beneficial in both helping to defuse the ticking, toxic time bomb at the club and to put in place the best guarantee for a successful post-Messi future.

As a key member of the last Barcelona side to win the Champions League, in 2015, Neymar has a great deal of pulling power. He may be injury prone but the hope at Camp Nou is that turning back the clock will give everyone a lift, not least the ex-Santos virtuoso.

To be frank, PSG would be happy to see him go. They are sick and tired of his diva-like antics and feel he has not shown the club sufficient respect, banking a salary of €48.9million yet rarely with a good word for the Parc des Princes outfit.

He and PSG's director of sport, Leonardo, do not enjoy the best of working relationships and the pair recently clashed once more, with the player accusing the club of playing him too sparingly prior to the round-of-16 Champions League game against Borussia Dortmund.

> PSG would be happy to see him go. They are sick and tired of his diva-like antics

According to those in the know, PSG value Neymar in the €180m-€200m bracket. However, the big question is can Barca afford him? After all, only last summer, they needed a loan to trigger Antoine Griezmann's €120m release from Atletico Madrid.

To drum up the funds for a deal, club president Josep Maria Bartomeu would have to sell. And that may mean listening to offers for hit-or-miss French winger Ousmane Dembele and possibly even Griezmann, who has rarely lit up Catalonia and has relatively few supporters in an often complicated dressing room.

Nick Bidwell

DENIS ZAKARIA

(Borussia Monchengladbach)
The Gladbach powers-that-be are quite rightly expecting a bumper pay day when they sell their much-coveted midfield anchor man. Tracked by a number of leading clubs in England, the 23-year-old has a market value of at least €50million – and if such a price were paid it would make him the club's most expensive sale of all time, surpassing the €45m that Arsenal spent on his fellow Swiss international Granit Xhaka in 2017.

While most would have to agree that Xhaka has hardly set North London alight, the Geneva-born Zakaria is cut from a decidedly different cloth. He is much cooler under pressure, does not have Xhaka's defensive frailties and is a better all-round footballer and athlete, full of running, accurate in his passing and a beast of a ball-winner. With his all-action style and long limbs he looks a new-millennium version of former France and Gunners great Patrick Vieira.

> "He is the complete player and yet still has a lot of unfulfilled potential"
>
> **Marco Rose**

Zakaria, who joined Gladbach from Young Boys of Berne three years ago, is the one individual the German side cannot do without. In the absence of the son of a South Sudanese mother and Congolese father, the system put together by coach Marco Rose would simply fall apart. If you want power, tempo and intense pressing, Zakaria is your man. He provides the glue which holds it all together.

One part of his armoury which often goes unnoticed is his speed over the ground. In-house tests at Gladbach revealed him to be the quickest player in the squad as he recorded an impressive 34.5km/h. Holding midfielders do not normally leave a vapour trail in their wake, but you need look no further for the reason for his extraordinary powers of recovery and his tremendous ability to snuff out opposition counter-attacks.

According to Rose: "He is the complete player and yet still has a lot of unfulfilled potential. He has unbelievable dynamism and understanding of the game."

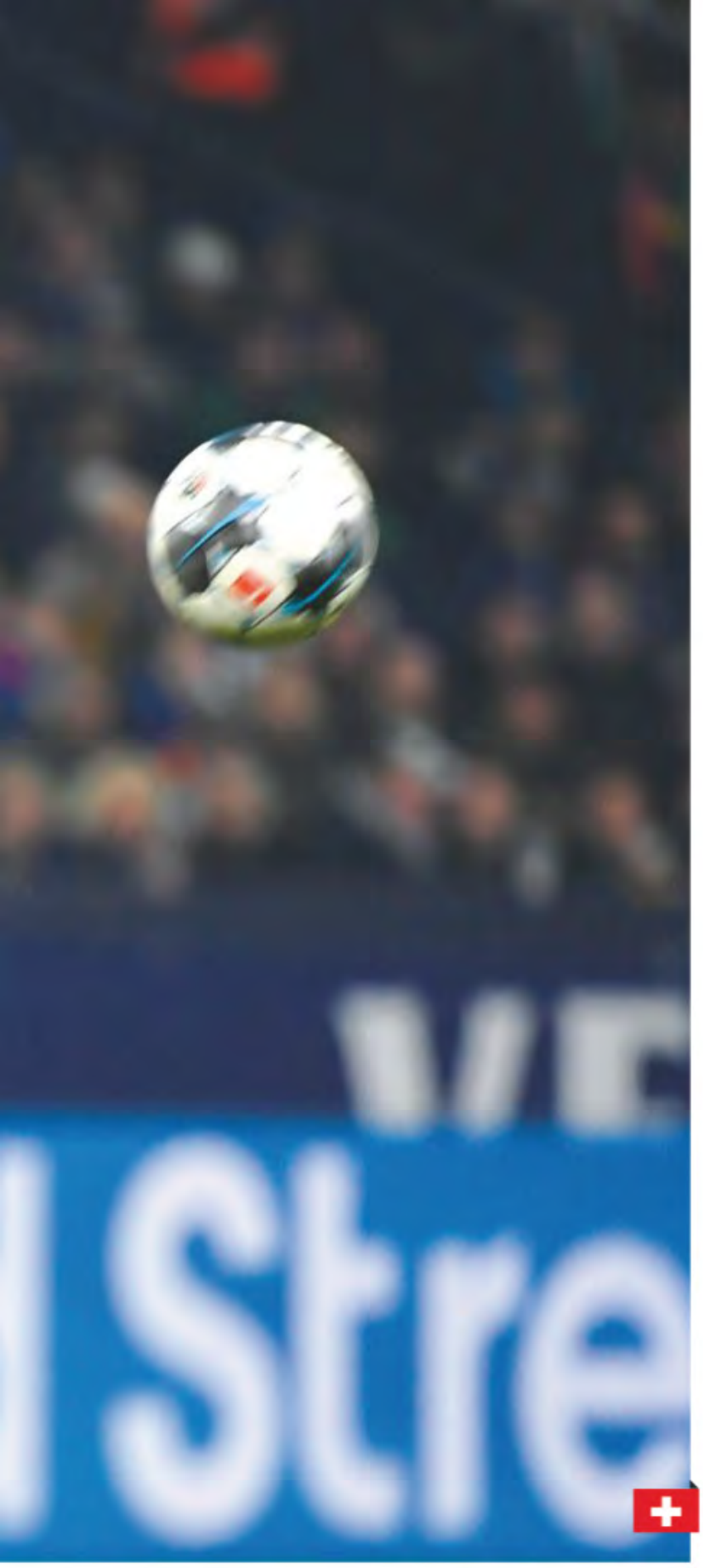
He has certainly come a long way in a relatively short time-span. A mere five years ago he was performing in the Swiss second tier with Servette. Modest and

MANUEL NEUER

(Bayern Munich)
Rumours of the German national keeper making a switch to Chelsea are not as far-fetched as they might seem. In new contract negotiations, Bayern and their skipper are poles apart. He wants a five-year deal, with the club prepared to offer two.

GABRIEL

(Lille)
Everton are one of several English sides hoping to land the 22-year-old centre-back. He comes with a highly affordable €30m price tag, though interested Premier League headhunters will have to be aware that PSG also have him firmly in their sights.



humble, he absolutely deserves his current star status.

"I hope it will never be said of me that I'm a big head," he told Swiss magazine *L'Illustre* earlier this year.

Nick Bidwell

MARASH KUMBULLA

(Verona)
An exceptional 20-year-old centre-back who is coveted by Manchester United, among others. Born in Italy to Albanian parents, he has chosen to nail his international colours to the latter's mast.

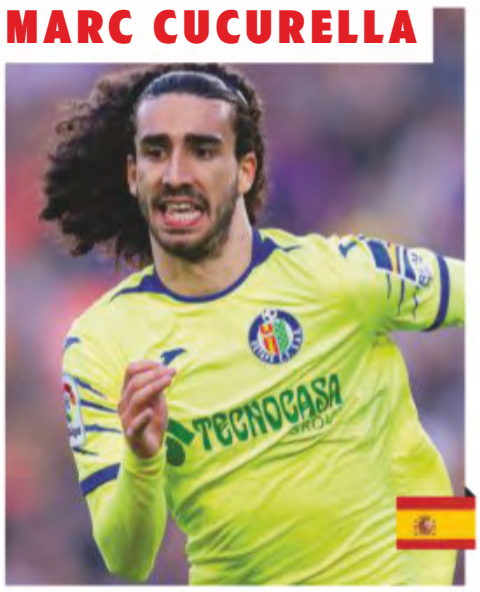
RUBEN DIAS

(Benfica)
Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur are said to be engaged in a battle for the Portuguese centre-back. Both will be trying to convince the Benfica power-that-be that they may need to reduce his €100m release clause.

MOUSSA DEMBELE

(Lyon)
Given his prolific goalscoring record with Lyon this term, and his UK experience with Fulham and Celtic, the Parisian striker is always going to be an attractive proposition for English outfits. Jean-Michel Aulas, Lyon's president, wants some €70m for him.

MARC CUCURELLA



(Getafe)
This excellent 21-year-old left-back has been one of the revelations of La Liga this season. On a 12-month loan deal from Barcelona, he has repeatedly caught the eye with his wide sphere of influence and never-say-die character.

FERRAN TORRES

(Valencia)
The tricky, right-winger is the new idol of the Mestalla, arguably the brightest forward prospect in Spain. Rare are the English clubs who do not rate him. The fly in the ointment? Real Madrid, who have tried and failed to sign him on three occasions.

JONATHAN DAVID

(Gent)

Both clubs may be renowned for their keen eye for fledgling talent, but don't remind the decision-makers at Red Bull Salzburg and Stuttgart of the fact they once let this 20-year-old sharpshooter slip through their fingers.

The pair brought the Canadian to Europe for trials as a teenager, in 2016 and 2017, only to decide that he did not fit the bill. Coaches at Salzburg informed him he'd struggle to make their B team and they only wanted imports who were better than their own academy pupils. Stuttgart's under-21 boss did not even bother to observe him in action.

David returned home to Ottawa with mixed feelings; he was deeply disappointed, of course, but equally convinced that he had what it takes to make it overseas. And when Belgian outfit Gent offered him a chance to try-out he made a lasting impression and signed for the club on his 18th birthday, in January 2018.

And what progress he has made in Flanders since.

He looked very much the part in his first season with the first team, scoring 14 times, and produced an even better set of finishing numbers this term with 23 goals in 40 Belgian championship and Europa League fixtures.

A Canada international for the last 20 months, he could not stop scoring for the national side last year, netting eight goals in total, including six at the CONCACAF Gold Cup. Little wonder he was voted the country's Player of the Year in December.

> With eight goals last year, including six at the CONCACAF Gold Cup, little wonder he was voted Canada's Player of the Year

Rated in the €20million plus bracket, he is currently being linked with top sides in England, Italy, Spain and Germany. He has, however, hinted that his preferred destination is the Bundesliga – and no doubt he would like to emulate the achievements of his compatriot and close friend Alphonso Davies, who has made the left-back berth his own at Bayern Munich this season.

As well as goals, goals, goals and an abundance of skill and speed, David also offers positional adaptability.

He was a pure striker growing up in Canada with a string of Ottawa clubs, but in truth he can play anywhere in the attacking third and Gent coach Jess Thorup tends to use him just behind twin strikers.

Nick Bidwell

ZIDANE BANJAQUI

(Aves)
After shining in the first half of the season with Aves' under-23s, the midfielder of Guinea-Bissau lineage has made extremely light work of the transition to the Portuguese top flight. Once on Benfica's books.

BRUNO PETKOVIC

(Dinamo Zagreb)
With five goals for Croatia in the Euro 2021 qualifiers, clubs including Barcelona are said to be closely watching the Dinamo centre-forward. Voted Player of the Year last term by club captains in the nation's top flight.

DOMINIK SZOBOSZLAI

(Red Bull Salzburg)
Now 19 – and with the likes of Juventus, Bayern Munich, Ajax and Napoli keen to snap him up – the classy attacking midfielder was only 16 when first called up to Hungary's senior squad.

ODSONNE EDOUARD

(Celtic)
The Hoops will undoubtedly feel the pinch should their goal-a-game striker be lured away to pastures new. One of an innumerable line of PSG academy graduates who felt compelled to seek first-team opportunities elsewhere.

ORKUN KOKCU

(Feyenoord)
Capped by Holland as a youth but now a Turkey under-21 international, the 19-year-old can turn his hand to any midfield task, equally comfortable in a deep-lying role, a box-to-box runner or number ten. A star performer for Feyenoord in the UEFA Youth League in 2017-18.

KONSTANTINOS TSIMIKAS

(Olympiakos)
Impressive left-back whose pace and attacking intent were there for all to see in his side's Champions League and Europe League campaigns this season. He spent some of his early years on loan at Denmark's Esbjerg and with Willem II in Holland.

SAID BENRAHMA

(Brentford)
It remains a mystery just how the Algerian wing virtuoso has won only three senior caps for his country. With his nimble footwork and vast array of tricks, the 24-year-old deserves a much higher platform than the English Championship.

ADAM HLOZEK

(Sparta Prague)
Mature 17-year-old second striker who many in the Czech Republic regard as the most talented player to emerge in those parts since Tomas Rosicky. Borussia Dortmund are among those in awe of his dribbling ability, superb finishing and physical resilience.

VICTOR OSIMHEN

(Lille)
In his first season in the French top flight after arriving for just €12m last summer from Belgian side Charleroi, the 21-year-old striker has enjoyed a rip-roaring time with LOSC. Interestingly, he is not one of Lille's top earners, banking €80,000 a month.

ACHRAF HAKIMI

(Borussia Dortmund)
Much to the dismay of Juventus, PSG, Bayern Munich and Chelsea, the always-raiding Moroccan right-back or wing-back is likely to return to Real Madrid when his successful two-year loan stint with Dortmund imminently comes to an end.

SAMUEL CHUKWUEZE

(Villarreal)
Shortlisted for the 2019 Kopa Trophy – the Ballon d'Or spin-off for the world's best under-21 player – the Nigerian winger managed just one vote in the final poll. But he need not be too disappointed, especially as his sole backer was Lionel Messi...

Messi knows an exciting, pulse-raising attacker when he sees one and the Villarreal star is most definitely that: lightning quick, an irresistible dribbler and able to effortlessly co-ordinate his upper body and lower limbs at high speed. A left-footed right-winger, he is a big fan of the Dutch flank-master Arjen Robben. And it shows.

Known as "Samu"' in La Liga circles, he can score extraordinary goals too, the best example being a wonderful solo effort in a 3-0 Copa del Rey victory at Girona in January, taking on and beating a string of mystified defenders prior to firing home.

According to *France Football*, Liverpool made an abortive attempt to sign him in the last transfer window as back-up for Mohamed Salah. They apparently offered €35million but were turned down flat, with the Spanish club insisting they were looking for a figure much closer to his €65m release clause. Other suitors are thought to include Real Madrid, Chelsea and Arsenal.

A graduate of the Diamond Football Academy in his home town of Umuahia, he first made a ripple on the international pond when playing a key role in his country's triumph at the 2015 World Under-17 finals, scoring three goals and creating another four.

Following that impressive showing he was contacted by clubs from England, Portugal and Austria before plumping for a place in the Villarreal youth ranks.

Nick Bidwell

Liverpool apparently offered €35million, only for his Spanish club to turn it down flat, insisting they were looking for a figure much closer to his €65m release clause

MOUSSA WAGUE

(Nice)
On his rare first-team run-outs with Barcelona, the adventurous Senegalese right-back has been anything but disappointing. Currently on a six-month loan deal with Ligue 1 Nice. in truth he's more of a winger.

YOUCEF ATAL

(Nice)
Despite Nice being owned by British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, the Cote d'Azur club will not play deaf to a big-money offer for their Algerian right-back, who is currently rehabilitating after a cartilage operation.

RIYAD MAHREZ

(Manchester City)
The Algerian winger of the soft-shoe shuffle can bamboozle with the very best. Reports in France state that PSG director of sport Leonardo is a big fan. Should they opt to sell, Manchester City will expect some £80m.

HAMED TRAORE

(Sassuolo)
The Ivory Coast under-23 attacking midfielder would appear to have the brightest of futures ahead of him. Presently on loan at Sassuolo from Empoli, he combines two-footed passing accuracy, drive and resourcefulness.

THOMAS PARTEY

(Atletico Madrid)
Never mind the constant stream of yellow cards, the Ghanaian is one dominant defensive midfielder, as effective shielding the back-line as avoiding a press with snappy passes. A release clause of €50m makes him very attractive.

JEREMIE BOGA

(Sassuolo)
Chelsea's predilection for stockpiling talented youngsters and repeatedly loaning them out has left many a player with a severe case of "out of sight, out of mind". But at least the Marseille-born winger seems to have found the antidote in Serie A with Sassuolo, where he has emerged as a highly influential figure this season.

The 23-year-old only appeared in one first-team game for the London side – a cameo appearance as a substitute against Burnley on the opening day of the 2017-18 season – and had to jump through all the usual loanee hoops, sent on secondment to Rennes in France, Spanish side Granada and Birmingham City in the English second tier.

Perhaps not surprisingly, none of the postings especially worked out.

> Under the intelligent tutelage of Sassuolo coach Roberto De Zerbi he is quite clearly thinking more about his game

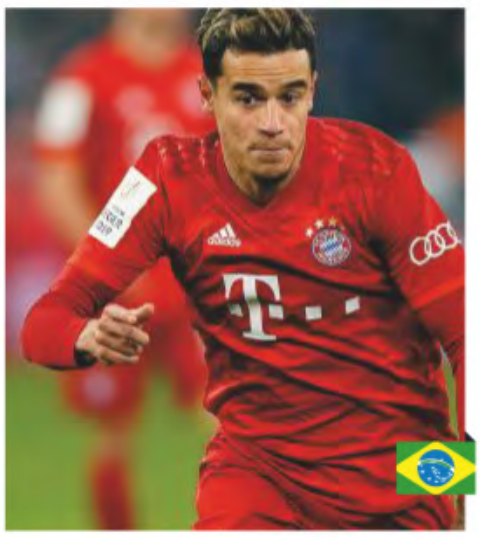
In such a system young players are very much at risk of ending up on the missing list. They lose their bearings, they lose their form and when setbacks come knocking it's hard to get back on track. Only the strong survive and full credit to Boga for successfully picking up the pieces since tip-toeing into Sassuolo in the summer of 2018.

If his inaugural season in Emilia-Romagna was a truncated affair – he spent the best part of three months on the sidelines after a tibia operation – his sophomore efforts this term have been the footballing equivalent of a firework display. Rapid rushes, goals and assists a gogo, and the sort of mazy dribbling which almost takes on the form of art. He says he developed his brilliance in one-on-one situations in never-ending kickabouts on the streets of his home town in the south of France.

He is now playing with more maturity, his decision-making is sharper and he has added variety to his modus operandi, combining more mobility and slick one-twos with the solo dashes. Under the intelligent tutelage of Sassuolo coach Roberto De Zerbi he is quite clearly thinking more about his game.

His best moment of the current season was undoubtedly an exquisite clipped finish in a 2-2 draw at champions Juventus in December. "This has to be one of my best moments with Sassuolo,"

PHILIPPE COUTINHO



(Bayern Munich)
After failing to live up to expectations at Barcelona and often a sub during a loan spell with Bayern this term, the midfielder finds himself at a career crossroads. He may be tempted to return to England, where he starred for Liverpool.

TANGUY NDOMBELE

(Tottenham Hotspur)
In the summer of 2019, following an excellent season in the Lyon engine room, he was wanted by virtually everybody. Now it's a totally different story after a poor first campaign in England with Spurs. A fresh start somewhere new looks to be the best option.

he said afterwards. "Scoring against an icon like Buffon is a thrill."

In fact, his renaissance has been so eye-catching that Chelsea are rumoured to be considering a €15million buy-back option. Others in the hunt include Napoli, Monaco and Everton.

Nick Bidwell

JULIAN DRAXLER

(Paris Saint-Germain)
An immensely versatile attacking-third operative with a crystalline touch, the German schemer has fallen dramatically down the pecking order at the Parc des Princes. A farewell to PSG will involve a huge pay cut as he currently earns €600,000 a month.

JAMES RODRIGUEZ

(Real Madrid)
Limited to just a handful of starts at the Bernabeu this term, the attacking midfielder must see the writing on the wall. Coach Zinedine Zidane simply does not rate the elegant left-footer – and at the age of 28 he cannot afford any more blank years.

OUSMANE DEMBELE

(Barcelona)
There's no way round it; since moving to Barca from Dortmund in an eye-watering €120m deal the winger has proved an anti-climax: too immature, too inconsistent and frequently injured. Which is a real shame for a player of such rare talent.

LUKA JOVIC

(Real Madrid)
After being such a prolific marksman for Eintracht Frankfurt in 2018-19, the Serb has lost his bearings since joining Real last summer. Much more is expected from a €60m signing than two goals and a mere 391 minutes of first-team action.

THOMAS LEMAR

(Atletico Madrid)
Good enough to be part of France's triumphant 2018 World Cup-winning squad, the former Monaco wide-man has to be aware that his time with Atletico is up as coach Diego Simeone tends to only use him from the bench. Bayern Munich could offer a way out.

SADIO MANE

(Liverpool)
Given his goals and intensity, it would be quite remarkable if the Merseysiders let the Senegalese international go. Several clubs, led by Real Madrid and PSG, are courting him but they may end up disappointed.

ERLING HAALAND

(Borussia Dortmund)
His serial scoring since joining the Ruhr giants in December has seen the teenage striker become a household name. Real Madrid seem to have convinced themselves they have a chance of bringing him in for next season.

DAYOT UPAMECANO

(RB Leipzig)
The ball is very much in the court of the 21-year-old French centre-back who has only 14 months left on his contract and has hinted he'd like to move on. Leipzig hope a €60m release-clause will deter would-be buyers for the time being.

MARC-ANDRE TER STEGEN

(Barcelona)
Barca and the German are said to be struggling to agree a new contract. Bayern Munich may look to take advantage, but any potential purchaser may have to break the world record for a keeper with a €90m bid.

KALIDOU KOULIBAY

(Napoli)
Anyone who thinks that Napoli owner and president Aurelio De Laurentiis will sell his centre-back for anything less than €100m needs to quickly re-evaluate. However, according to French media sources, the 27-year-old recently bought a luxury apartment in Paris.

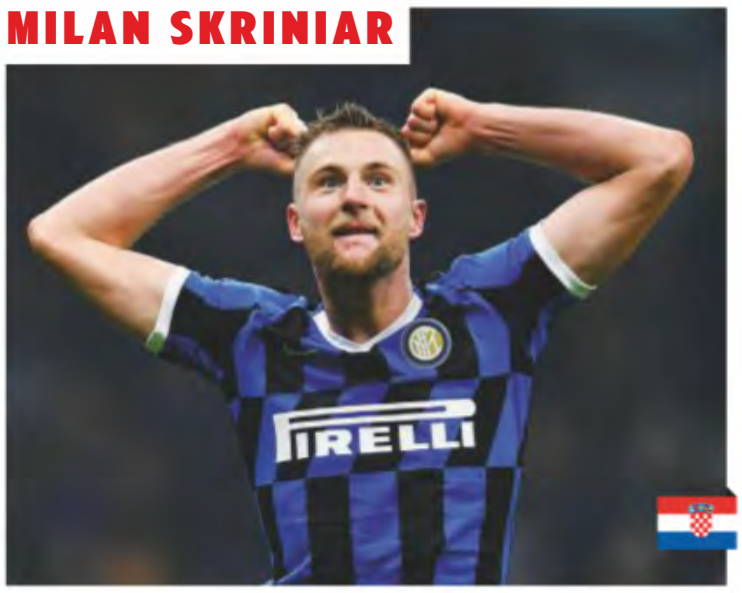
DAVID ALABA

(Bayern Munich)
With his contract entering its final year this summer, the defender has spoken of a future away from the Allianz-Arena. With Barcelona and Real Madrid said to be hovering in the wings, the Bayern hierarchy will pull out all the stops to get him to sign a new deal.

FEDERICO CHIESA

(Fiorentina)
Viola president Rocco Commisso is thought to be demanding around €70m for the 22-year-old Italy international winger, who is the son of ex Serie A star attacker Enrico Chiesa. Plenty of clubs in Italy and England would be willing to pay that.

MILAN SKRINIAR



(Internazionale)
The 25-year-old centre-back is reportedly being pursued by both Manchester clubs, Real Madrid and Barcelona at present. But the *Nerazzurri* director of sport Piero Ausilio will not give the ex-Sampdoria man away and could well hold out for at least €85m.

SAUL NIGUEZ

(Atletico Madrid)

While Manchester United's hopes of recruiting Atletico's talismanic midfielder are not exactly hanging by a thread, executives from the Red Devil camp will have to do far more than merely snap their fingers and watch the 25-year-old come running to Old Trafford.

The six seasons remaining on his contract and a €150million release clause constitute formidable barriers to any change of club. On an emotional level he is very attached to *Atleti*, having been with them since he was 14 and a first-teamer for the last eight years.

The Spain international underlined his loyalty to the club in an interview with Cadena Sur radio station in November, saying: "I'm under contract with Atletico until 2026 and have nothing else on my mind. If another extension is drawn up, I'll sign. An improved salary? Things are fine as they are. This is a good team and the coach believes in me."

Not that United and other interested parties – not least Manchester City and Barcelona – should automatically give up the chase. According to the *Mundo Deportivo* sports daily, talks about a new deal have not been going well, with Saul's representatives unimpressed by the money currently on the table.

Any transfer would depend on how much Atletico are willing to shave off the buy-out figure. In the current climate, would they countenance a reduction to €100m or maybe even less?

> One of his claims to fame is that whenever he scores Atletico never lose

Diego Simeone would be loathe to lose him as the Atletico coach always finds room for Saul, who had only missed one competitive fixture this season and that was because of suspension.

Saul would be a welcome addition to any top-class side. He is dynamic, has a wonderful range of pass and can score goals. Indeed, one of his claims to fame is that whenever he scores Atletico never lose. He is a man for the big occasion, scoring in the Champions League these past few seasons against Bayern Munich, Barcelona, Real Madrid and Liverpool.

What's more he is immensely versatile. Although at his most potent in a box-to-box role, he is equally comfortable as a wide midfielder, on either flank, and also has lots of experience as a left-back.

At one and the same time, distributor, destroyer and opportunist goal-grabber? He would fit nicely in the Premier League.

Nick Bidwell

HARRY KANE

(Tottenham Hotspur)
The England centre-forward has been out with a hamstring injury all year – not that it has affected his value. Any buyer would have to cough up at least £150m. And no one would expect Spurs chairman Daniel Levy to offer a discount.

PAUL POGBA

(Manchester United)
It's common knowledge that the midfielder is desperate to leave Old Trafford. His former employers at Juventus and Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane would both love to give him his own escape plan. Ankle trouble has kept him out for most of 2019-20.

LEROY SANE

(Manchester City)

This buzz-saw of a winger, who tore ligaments in his right knee in August's Community Shield and hasn't made a competitive appearance this term, is one unlucky guy.

At the time of his breakdown on the Wembley turf he was on the verge of moving to Bayern Munich in a €120million transaction that would have made him the most expensive German player of all time. A cruel twist of fate, indeed.

The smart money says that the 24-year-old does not have a future at Manchester City, where coach Pep Guardiola is thought to have reservations about the wide man's mentality, perplexed by his habit of switching the intensity switch on and off. Too laid-back in training, too irregular in his performances on match days,

> The winger has no intention of negotiating a contract extension and City will not want to see him leave on a Bosman next year

Sane's statistics for the second half of last season tell their own story, starting just three of City's last 10 Premier League fixtures and omitted from every big game.

A £37m purchase from Schalke in the summer of 2016, he has grown thoroughly frustrated in England and a bench-warming mission is no use to a full international with 21 senior caps and a reputation for explosive, adroit excellence.

Yes, he is prone to inconsistency. Yes, he can be aloof and lacking in positive body language. But when firing on all cylinders he is undoubtedly a class act, a compelling mixture of breakneck speed and mesmerising ball skills, the balletic and the ballistic.

Bayern still have him in their sights and director of sport Hasan Salihamidzic has been working on putting a deal together. He is naturally aware of the ace card in his possession: the fact that the winger has no intention of negotiating a contract extension and City will not want to see him leave on a Bosman next year.

Rumours of Sane's imminent arrival at the Allianz-Arena were circulating during the January transfer window, but Bayern chose to play it safe, opting to wait until the player is fully fit again.

Just to further complicate proceedings, German weekly *Sport Bild* claims that Barcelona and Real Madrid have entered

BLAISE MATUIDI

(Juventus)
A World Cup winner with France in 2018, the midfielder is recovering after coronavirus. Tottenham Hotspur and ex-club Paris Saint-Germain are said to be keen on recruiting the 32-year-old.

the auction room, with both said to be preparing bids of €80m-€100m.

Sane has been back in full training at City since late January and made his post-injury comeback a month later in a run-out with his club's under-23 side.

Nick Bidwell

DONYELL MALEN

(PSV)
Thought to be an object of desire for Barcelona and a number of Premier League clubs, the 21-year-old Dutch international striker fell victim to a serious knee injury just before Christmas. He is reportedly worth €25m-€30m.

KEVIN VOLLAND

(Bayer Leverkusen)
Prior to damaging ankle ligaments in February, the 27-year-old striker was playing well enough to have many German pundits lobbying for him to be recalled to the national team. Often linked with Premier League clubs.

NICOLO ZANIOLO

(Roma)
Although on the injured list until the summer after rupturing the ACL in his right knee early this year, the 20-year-old midfielder is still much sought after, with Juventus and Paris Saint Germain said to be ready to bid €50m-€60m for his services.

MEMPHIS DEPAY

(Lyon)
When Jean-Michel Aulas puts a price on a player it's that figure or no deal. So the Dutch striker, who has damaged cruciate ligaments in his left knee, will only be allowed to leave OL if €50m is on the table. Tottenham, Milan and Lazio take note.

JUDE BELLINGHAM

(Birmingham City)
Probably the most accomplished youngster to come out of St Andrews since Trevor Francis ruled the roost in the early 1970s. A box-to-box midfielder, he has Manchester United, Chelsea and Borussia Dortmund on his case.

EDUARDO CAMAVINGA

(Rennes)
Still only 17, the defensive midfielder plays with the assurance of a senior pro. With an exemplary touch and great awareness, he bears a passing resemblance to Dutch icon Ruud Gullit when he gallops forward. Real Madrid and PSG are admirers.

RAYAN CHERKI

(Lyon)
Never mind that the attacking midfielder has spent just 16-and-a-half years on this earth, only made his debut for OL in October – when introduced for the last few minutes of a goalless Ligue 1 draw with Dijon – and has mainly been used as a substitute this season.

For the vast majority of French football observers, Cherki is indubitably the most promising young player in the country; a teenager with the sort of extraordinary technical gifts which come along once in a blue moon.

Emissaries from the Premier League and other top continental sides are already on the case of the Lyon-born son of Italian and Algerian parents, as are Real Madrid scouts. And if the rumours are true, the Spanish giants are likely to find themselves at the front of a very long queue. Cherki himself recently admitted in an interview with OLTV that Real was his dream club.

> Cherki is the most promising young player in the country

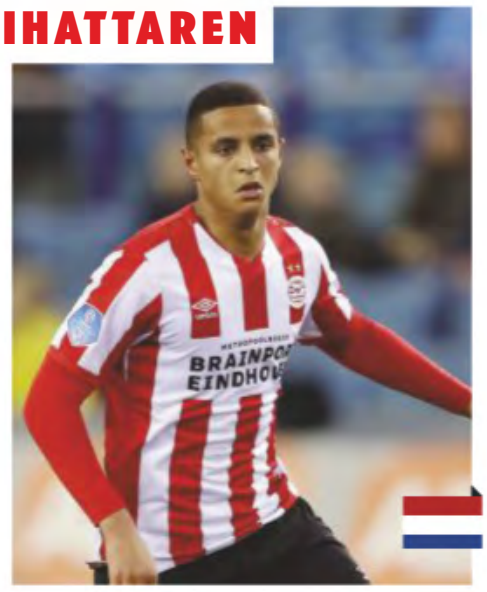
Anyone keen to see what the fuss is all about should immediately check out the highlights of Lyon's 4-3 victory over Nantes in the Coupe de France in January. Every aspect of his performance that night was seeped in pure precocious class. Besides scoring twice and setting up the other two goals, he was nothing less than the beating heart of Lyon's attacking operation, always demanding the ball, imaginative in his link-up work and masterfully choreographing the dance. He even found the time for a spot of ball-winning and to serve as one of the mediators when a full-scale brawl broke out late in the game.

Two footed, hard to dispossess and energetic, his number one asset is a talent to effortlessly manipulate the ball. He has no problem dribbling in the tightest of spots and can perforate any defence with his feints, shuffles and assorted trickery at high tempo. He is a mature boy too, having quickly learned that the rabid over-indulgence which was his stock in trade in Lyon's junior sides is now off-limits in the first team.

A Lyon scout first spotted him playing in a local park and he has been on the club's books since the age of seven, invariably competing with boys two or three years his senior.

And football is a family affair for the Cherki clan. His mother serves as his agent, his father is on the service staff at Lyon's Groupama stadium, while his elder

MOHAMED IHATTAREN



(PSV)
An academy graduate, the midfielder has the highest standards of vision and dead-ball expertise. Has chosen to represent Holland internationally, spurning an approach from Morocco.

brother Adam is part of the OL marketing team. A younger brother, Eden, plays for the club's under-nines.

They certainly know how to churn out prodigies at OL. First Karim Benzema, Hatem Ben Arfa, Nabil Fekir and now Cherki. Remember the name.

Nick Bidwell

JEREMY DOKU

(Anderlecht)
In a season of marked under-achievement at the club, the emergence of the right-winger was a rare ray of sunshine. Liverpool have been tracking him for some time and other Premier League sides are following on.

TAKEFUSA KUBO

(Mallorca)
Few attacking midfielders are more wily and elusive in reduced spaces than this 18-year-old. Currently on loan at Mallorca from Real Madrid, the word is that his heart remains at Barcelona, where he used to feature at the club's renowned La Masia school.

NICO MELAMED

(Espanyol)
Creative 18-year-old right-footer whose best work is done on the left flank. Already sparking the interest of Real Madrid, Barcelona, Chelsea and Bayern Munich, he made his debut for Espanyol in August.

SERGINO DEST

(Ajax)
According to magazine *Voetbal International*, Bayern Munich had a €20m bid for the attack-conscious right-back rejected during the January transfer window. They are sure to come back with an improved offer for the Dutch-born USA international.

MUSA AL TAAMARI
(APOEL)

Currently in his second season with perennial Cypriot champions APOEL, the dribble-happy Jordanian winger's penchant for leading opposition full-backs a merry dance could soon lead to the 22-year-old making the obvious move to a mainstream European championship.

Voted the Cypriot league's player of the year last season, Al Taamari is a classic wide man: short of stature, as fast as an arrow, deft on the ball and enormously creative.

Previously with Shabab Al Ordon and Al Jazeera in his homeland, he is as persistent as he is tricky and pacy. If he does not beat his full-back first time around he will keep trying until he does. He is the itch a marker cannot scratch.

In truth, his nom de plume, "the Jordanian Messi", has not been particularly helpful and such comparisons can be facile and corny. To the cynical mind it spells unwarranted hyperbole. But he patently does pose a genuine advanced threat. With his quick feet and audacity he can destabilise any defence, capable of skipping past a man both inside and out.

> His *nom de plume*, "the Jordanian Messi", has not been particularly helpful

He is especially potent as a one-man counter-attacking machine, either leading the charge and playing in a team-mate, making a clever decoy run or taking sole charge of the manoeuvre.

Jordan's 4-2 friendly loss to Paraguay last autumn was the showcase for one of his typically electrifying actions on the break, receiving a pass wide on the right, cutting inside, leaving two defenders for dead before shooting emphatically home with his trusty left foot.

Self-confident and bold, this is a player who prefers to march to the sound of his own drum. During his formative years in Jordan, rather than opting to join one of the country's "Big Two" – Al Faisaly and Al Wehdat – or ply his trade in one of the many lucrative Gulf leagues, he was only ever interested in moving to Europe.

He finally got his wish in July 2018

TERUHITO NAKAGAWA

(Yokohama F Marinos)
A logical choice as the J.League's Most Valuable Player for 2019, the right winger was much to the fore as his side claimed their first championship in 15 years. A late-bloomer at 27, he specialises in spectacular solo goals.

CYLE LARIN

(Zulte Waregem)
Yet another of the ever-growing band of Canadian talent. Sent out on loan this season by Turkish side Besiktas, the striker has taken to the Belgian league like a duck to water, scoring and making lots of goals and proving to be an all-round menace.

when signing for APOEL. That was stage one of his career path. The time now seems right for step two.

Nick Bidwell

AARON LONG

(New York Red Bulls) Subject to an affordable $6m release clause, the towering centre-back looks value-for-money from top to bottom. The 27-year-old has the focus and leadership ability to carve out a great career.

GONZALO MARTINEZ

(Atlanta United) The talented ex-River Plate winger or attacking midfielder may have found the going tough in the 2019 MLS, his first season in the States, but should not be written off. It may be MLS' high athletic content does not suit him.

MARTIN BRAITHWAITE

(Barcelona) Just a couple of months after arriving at Barca as emergency cover, the former Leganes centre-forward is already being touted to leave. Should Neymar or Lautaro Martinez sign on at Camp Nou, there will be no place for the Danish international.

JOSE MACIAS

(Guadalajara) Likened to Barcelona and Uruguay striker Luis Suarez, the 20-year-old Mexican is technically gifted, hyperactive, bristles with determination and has a killer instinct in front of goal. European prominence awaits.

UGURCAN CAKIR

(Trabzonspor) Reporters on Istanbul-based daily *Sabah* have been running stories that a number of top clubs, including European champions Liverpool, have a soft spot for the 23-year-old keeper. Capped twice so far by Turkey.

DRIES MERTENS

(Napoli)
Any team lucky enough to recruit the long-serving Belgium international on a free transfer can be sure of a hat-trick of welcome benefits: the versatility to operate as main striker, left-winger or front-line floater, lots of goals and a gutsy attitude.

The 32-year-old, a Neapolitan favourite for the past seven seasons, might physically be a tiny willow in a forest of towering oaks, but he can always be relied upon to put in a shift. Hyperactive and bristling with a will to win, he is always ready to go that extra mile for his colours.

He has certainly not had the easiest of career paths, judged too small and frail to make the grade at the Anderlecht academy, given the same brush-off by Gent and forced to reconfigure in non-elite Benelux leagues at Eendracht Aalst in Belgium's third division and AGOVV in the Dutch second tier.

> "On the pitch I'm quick, I'm direct, I try things, I put in crosses. The fans can see that I don't calculate"

He had to battle for top-flight acceptance and only on moving to Eredivisie sides Utrecht and PSV did he truly establish himself as one to watch. So much for the Dutch agent, who once infamously dubbed him "a garden gnome" and said he would struggle to play in the sixth tier.

"I think that [my popularity with the public] is linked to my style of play," he declared last autumn in an interview with the Belgian publication *Sport/Foot Magazine*. "On the pitch I'm quick, I'm direct, I try things, I put in crosses. The fans can see that I don't calculate."

This season has been a mixed bag for Mertens. On a personal level he has often hit the heights, scoring half a dozen Champions League goals and becoming the most productive marksman in Napoli history, an honour he now shares with Slovak midfielder Marek Hamsik on 121 goals. That he has surpassed Diego Maradona is some feather in his cap.

By way of contrast, Napoli were seen as title contenders at the start of the season but have been poor. Their hopes of a Champions League qualifying spot were hanging by a thread and the scars remain from November's mutiny when the squad refused an order from club president Aurelio De Laurentiis to attend a punishment training retreat.

Mertens apparently was one of the

CHARLES ARANGUIZ

(Bayer Leverkusen)
The midfield all-rounder and twice Copa America gold medallist will not be without a dance partner when the music starts to play at the beginning of next season. His agent has revealed that he is in serious contact with Italian and Spanish clubs.

WILLIAN

(Chelsea}
The Brazilian can be too irregular in his attacking productivity and effectiveness at times. But he should have no trouble finding alternative employment, with Arsenal, Tottenham, Juventus and Barcelona all keen on him.

leading rebels and, like his team-mates, he was heavily fined by De Laurentiis, although their relationship seems to have improved somewhat.

Meanwhile, Internazionale and a number of Premier League outfits wait for their moment to pounce.

Nick Bidwell

OLIVIER GIROUD

(Chelsea)
The striker is a walking, talking mystery. Either misunderstood, maligned or just underrated, the 33-year-old is one of those players who just does not receive the respect he deserves. A selfless attacking focal point who brings out the best in others.

DAVID SILVA

(Manchester City)
One of the finest imports to the Premier League, the little midfield magician has a number of options for the autumn of his career: a return to his native Spain, a stint in the MLS or perhaps even plying his trade in Japan.

GIACOMO BONAVENTURA

(Milan)
For someone who has spent much of this season on the *Rossoneri* fringes, the 30-year-old midfielder has a remarkably wide following, with Napoli, Roma, Fiorentina, Lazio and Torino all in pursuit. Coveted for his tactical understanding.

EDINSON CAVANI

(Paris Saint-Germain)
After seven seasons gutsily leading the line for PSG, he will be wearing a different set of colours next season. The club's record scorer, he has been linked with Atletico Madrid and old club Napoli, but may prefer to take on a South American mission.

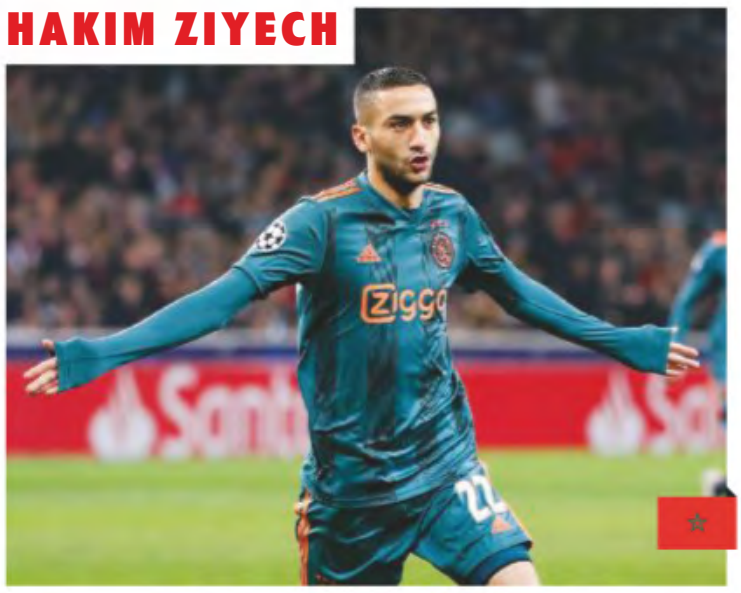
ARTEM DZYUBA

(Zenit)
All the signs are that this bruiser of a centre-forward will enter the Premier League in a not-too-distant future. The skipper of Russia, he came close to joining Everton in 2019 and recently revealed that Tottenham enquired about him in January.

TRINCAO

(Braga to Barcelona)
In a sign of just how highly Barca value the 20-year-old winger, his five-year deal at Camp Nou contains a €500m release clause. Ahead of his €31m arrival he was in the Portugal team that won the 2018 Under-19 Euros and has been capped at under-21 level.

HAKIM ZIYECH



(Ajax to Chelsea)
On the face of it, the London club has engineered quite a coup in snapping up the right-winger for only £36m. The 27-year-old has plenty going for him: a great left foot, trickery on the ball, and the variety and fluidity he adds to the attacking mix.

ANTONY

(Sao Paulo to Ajax)

"It's a sale that no one wanted," said Sao Paulo's director of football, Rai, in February when the club announced that winger Antony Matheus dos Santos would be leaving.

But Ajax certainly wanted it. That is why they were prepared to lay down an initial €16million, with a possibility of €6m more plus a generous percentage of any sale they make of another former Sao Paulo winger, David Neres.

And it is the way that the Dutch club have developed Neres that makes the destination so attractive for Antony. No one doubts his talent but he is raw, and Ajax would seem to be the ideal club to turn a skillful winger into a well-rounded attacking weapon.

After developing through Sao Paulo's youth ranks from the age of 10, Antony broke into the first team in 2018. The following year he was the outstanding player as his club won the prestigious Sao Paulo junior tournament and he then established himself as a first-team regular, finishing the league season with 29 games, four goals and six assists.

> Ajax would seem the ideal club to turn a skillful winger into a well-rounded attacking weapon

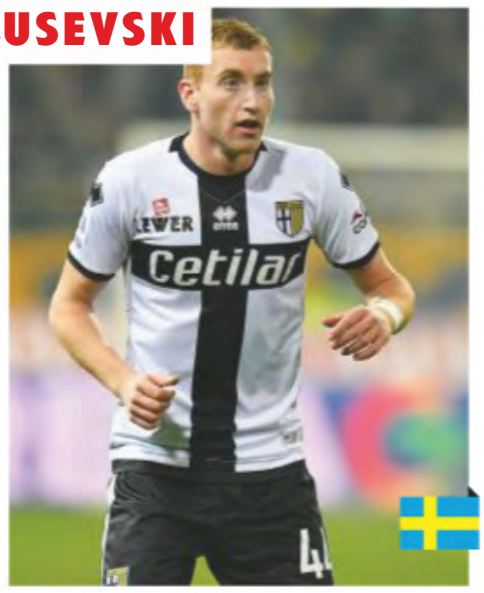
Slightly built but beautifully balanced, with splendid close control and a fine turn of pace, he likes to play wide on the right and cut in onto his stronger left foot.

South America's Olympic qualifiers served as a shop window for his virtues and his whippy crosses were a danger to all. However, for the must-win clash with Argentina he was left out – and Brazil were the better for it. Too often he had slowed the attack down, receiving the ball, manoeuvring it onto his left foot, cutting infield – and giving the opposing defence time to reorganise.

This decision-making aspect of his game is something that Ajax have an excellent track record of teaching.

Tim Vickery

DEJAN KULUSEVSKI



(Atalanta to Juventus)
Once a box-to-box midfielder, the Sweden-born left-footer of North Macedonian ancestry has been excelling on loan at Parma as a right winger. Juve are convinced he is worth every bit of his €35m fee.

ALEXANDER NUBEL

(Schalke to Bayern Munich)
Less than a decade after luring Manuel Neuer away from Schalke, the Bavarians are pulling off another Ruhr goalkeeping heist, bringing in the 23-year-old on a free transfer.

YAN COUTO

(Coritiba to Manchester City)
Considered by many in Brazil as the right-back heir apparent to Dani Alves, he is smart and lightning quick. Played a key role in his country's triumph at the World Under-17 championship in November.

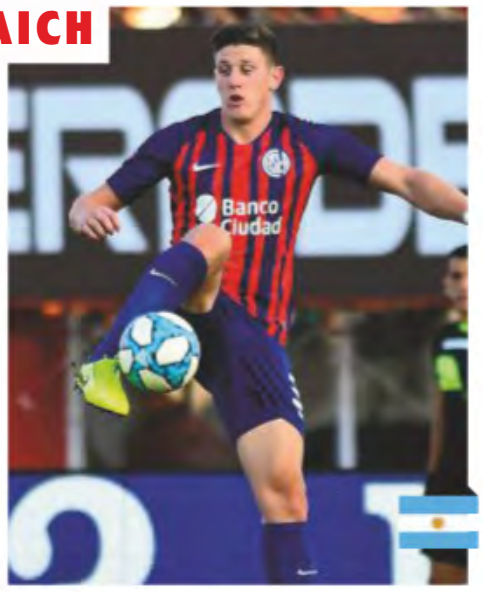
SOFYAN AMRABAT

(Verona to Fiorentina)
Everyone connected with Verona was broken-hearted on hearing that the central midfielder had agreed to a €20m move. He is both a tenacious possession-restorer and a major threat when breaking forward with the ball.

PEDRINHO

(Corinthians to Benfica)
The 21-year-old left-footed right-winger can be a thrilling one-man show, offering a hugely impressive palette of tricks, incisive passing and a fearsome shot from distance. A Brazilian champion with Corinthians in 2017.

ADOLFO GAICH



(San Lorenzo)
Big centre-forward who brings back memories of Martin Palermo and is better than his clumsy appearance might indicate, sniffing optimistically in search of goals. Nearly went to Belgium in the last window.

GONZALO MONTIEL

(River Plate)
Attacking right-back with a handful of international caps who has spent the past three years as part of the River Plate side and won the Copa Libertadores in 2018. Attracting interest from all over Europe.

KLUIVERTH AGUILAR

(Alianza Lima)
Strapping attacking right-back whose father was a fan of Holland's national team. Has been capped by Peru at under-23 level this year despite being just 16. Manchester City are among the many clubs that are watching his progress closely.

MATHEUS HENRIQUE

(Gremio)
Dynamic, fetch-and-carry type of skipping central midfielder with a style that is similar to that of Barcelona's Arthur – the player that he replaced in the Gremio first team. Already a full international, he is destined for bigger things.

EVERTON

(Gremio)
Exciting winger who was the breakout star of Brazil's Copa America win last year. A few seasons ago such a leading role would have instantly earned him a move to one of the European giants. However, at 24 his options going forward might be slightly more restricted.

JOSE CIFUENTES

(Los Angeles)
Powerhouse central midfielder who made his name with Ecuador's excellent 2019 under-20 team. Left CD America of Quito for the MLS earlier this year for a reported fee of $3m, but has his sights firmly set on going to Europe.

FACUNDO PELLISTRI

(Penarol)
Skillful and intelligent wide midfielder who enjoyed a fine breakthrough last year in Uruguay and should develop nicely under club coach Diego Forlan. At 18 he is unlikely to stay in his homeland for much longer.

YEFERSON SOTELDO

(Santos)
One of the leading graduates from Venezuela's 2017 under-20 side. Coming into his own in Brazil after playing in Chile, he is a tiny winger with marvelous close control whose decision making is improving as he takes on extra responsibility.

THIAGO ALMADA

(Velez Sarsfield)
Velez Sarsfield's interest in this year's Copa Sudamericana appeared to be over in February. Away to Aucas of Ecuador they were seconds from elimination – until they were awarded an injury-time penalty. The pressure was on, but up stepped an 18-year-old to save the day with a nerveless spot-kick.

After growing up in the notoriously violent Fort Apache area of Buenos Aires, Thiago Almada was not going to be fazed by the challenge of beating a goalkeeper from 12 yards.

Fort Apache is the neighbourhood of Carlos Tevez and, though a decade and a half apart, he and Almada played for the same local side. And both were coached by Eduardo Hernandez, who says: "Almada has much more technique. *Carlitos* always stood out for his drive and desire, but on the ball Thiago is better."

After coming through the ranks, Almada had the good fortune to reach the Velez first team while Gabriel Heinze was in charge. Heinze gave youth its head and developed some promising players in an attack-minded side.

After being given his debut in August 2018 Almada grew in confidence as he was handed more responsibility, helping Velez to finish third in the 2019-20 Superliga, behind champions Boca Juniors and River Plate.

> "Almada has much more technique. *Carlitos* always stood out for his drive and desire, but on the ball Thiago is better"
>
> **Eduardo Hernandez**

Operating mostly behind a main striker in the number 10 role, he can also play out wide – the position where he is most likely to see action in Europe, with Manchester City and Lisbon's Sporting known to be among his admirers.

With his close control and capacity to see a pass, the influence of Eden Hazard is clear, although he is of slighter build than the Belgian star and not nearly as strong on the ball.

Time, however, is on the side of the latest starlet to scale the walls and break out of Fort Apache.

Tim Vickery

Glenn Moore

Equal-pay row costs Cordeiro

Dispute tears US federation apart

There was something different about the USA women's team when they ran out before the SheBelieves Cup game with Japan in Texas. Their warm-up shirts were inside out. This rendered the badge of governing body United States Soccer Federation (USSF) invisible but, because of the stitching, still revealed the badge outline and the four stars above it – one for each Women's World Cup success.

The whole squad, not just the starting line-up, then posed for a pre-match photo in the inside-out shirts, a photo subsequently tweeted out by some of the players. As protests go it was mightily effective. The following day the president of USSF, Carlos Cordeiro, resigned.

> "I don't think a trial is good for either party or for soccer"
>
> Cindy Parlow Cone

The kit change was a squad response to newly released filings from their gender discrimination case against USSF which revealed the federation's strategy was to argue the women were being paid less than the men's team because they had "less skill, ability and responsibility".

This was a lawyer's argument. To win a suit under the Equal Pay Act the US women's team have to prove their work is sufficiently equal to the men's. USSF's legal strategy was to deny that claim.

This may have made sense legally, but in the wider court of public opinion it was incendiary. The players were furious and it soon became clear USSF's tactic was wildly out of step with the national mood.

BreakingT, a sports clothing company, produced a T-shirt licensed by the USWNT Players Association called "Four Stars Only" based on the inside-out shirt and it quickly became their fastest-selling item, shifting more than 5,000 copies in the first 24 hours.

The American Outlaws, the long-established 30,000-strong group of hardcore supporters of both male and female US teams, issued a statement describing USSF's argument that the women's soccer side was inferior to the men's as "objectionable and disappointing". Also weighing in on the USWNT's side, perhaps more worrying for USSF, were a series of major sponsors.

MLS commissioner and USSF board member Don Garber, the Athletes' Council – a body of past and present US internationals which had backed Cordeiro's 2018 election – and Cordeiro's vice-president Cindy Parlow Cone also criticised the strategy and language.

Cordeiro, who had seemed the living embodiment of the American dream having arrived in the US as a 15-year-old immigrant son of a widowed mother then becoming a Harvard graduate and Goldman Sachs executive, fell on his sword. How much he was individually responsible for the strategy is unclear – he said he had not "fully reviewed the filing" – but he had exacerbated an already bitter dispute when, on International Women's Day, he released a letter arguing the federation had already offered an equal-pay deal. The players dismissed this as riddled with falsehoods. Trust between them had broken down.

Parlow Cone, a member of the 1999 World Cup-winning team, took over. She is the first woman to hold the influential but unpaid position and will remain in the role until February 2021. She is joined at the helm by a new CEO, Will Wilson, who has been a players' agent working in NFL but has past experience with USSF's marketing partner.

Inside out...(from left) Kelley O'Hara, Sam Mewis and Adrianna Franch make their point

High profile...Megan Rapinoe celebrates a goal against Japan in the SheBelieves Cup

Their in-box is full. Pressing concerns include the need to ensure the men's team qualify for Qatar 2022 after missing out on the 2018 World Cup, laying the groundwork for the north American joint-hosting of the 2026 men's World Cup, and overseeing a coaching structure that has needed rebuilding, in part due to an edict that all age-group coaches move to Chicago.

But a priority, they stressed in their first joint appearance, is settling the legal case with the USWNT and restoring trust. "I don't think a trial is good for either party or for soccer," said Parlow Cone. "I'm hopeful that we can find a resolution before this goes to trial." Wilson added: "I would echo that. It's a priority, and finding a solution would be the best way to go forward."

That will involve USSF making a financial settlement. The only question is how much. The players are seeking $67million in back pay and damages plus punitive damages, and a commitment to equal pay going forward. The figures have been arrived at by assessing what the women would have earned in recent years were they paid the same as the men.

Parlow Cone has officially withdrawn the controversial claim that the men's game is superior, calling it "offensive". But USSF still argues, more reasonably, the pay disparity is largely because rewards at the men's World Cup are far greater than the women's and that is down to

Historic...new USSF president Cindy Parlow Cone

FIFA, not USSF. A $67m award, they argue, would cripple their ability to fund youth and other programmes.

It is true that the dispute is not like for like. The men are primarily paid by their clubs while the women who play in NWSL – usually all of them – have their salaries underwritten by USSF. But they also play far more internationals than the men, 27 to 15 in the last year, and generate significant income doing so, not least as they almost always play at home. And they are far more successful, with Megan Rapinoe and Carli Lloyd both as high-profile as any male US player.

The case, filed in March last year, is due for trial in Los Angeles on May 5 but that date is in jeopardy due to restrictions imposed by the coronavirus. Delay may provide time for a settlement.

While the players are likely to accept much less than $67m, a deal would still be a victory for Rapinoe, Lloyd and co even more significant than their World Cup triumph in France last summer. WS

Round-up

Delayed...England's Jordan Nobbs and Phil Neville with the Euro trophy

EURO 2021 MOVED

The women's Euro 2021 will be rescheduled after the men's Euro 2020 was moved to the summer of 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

With the latter stages of the men's competition to be held at Wembley, and all the women's matches to be hosted in England, there would be an overlap.

With the Olympics – whose women's football tournament features first-choice teams – also moving to summer 2021 the women's Euros are likely to be shifted to summer 2022. There is space as the men's World Cup is being played later in the year in Qatar.

The UEFA Women's Champions League, like all domestic competitions, was suspended indefinitely due to the virus outbreak.

Commanding...Melbourne City keeper Lydia Williams in the Grand Final

FRANCE, GERMANY AND CROATIA WIN VIRUS-HIT TOURNAMENTS

Hosts France won the inaugural Tournoi de France defeating Canada and Brazil 1-0, before a 94th-minute equaliser secured a draw with Holland. The first four matches produced only two goals, the last two 10, but that final round of matches was played behind closed doors due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The pandemic also affected the Algarve Cup with Italy forced to return home before they could play the Final with Germany for fear of being unable to do so due to an incipient travel ban. Thailand withdrew from the lower-ranking Cyprus Cup due to the contagion. Croatia won the truncated competition.

MELBOURNE TOP DOWN UNDER

The last major women's match to be played before COVID-19 forced a lockdown was the Grand Final of Australia's W-League. Melbourne City, the regular-season winners, beat defending champions Sydney FC 1-0 with a goal from Steph Catley. It was City's fourth title in five seasons and was played behind closed doors in Melbourne's 30,000-capacity AAMI Park.

"It was weird," said City's Kyah Simon. "It sounds like you are listening to music with no bass. There was no real sound other than our own."

Best...Alexia Putellas

SPAIN IMPRESS

Spain underlined their recent progress on their debut in the SheBelieves Cup. *La Roja* beat Japan and England, and pushed the US close, with Barcelona's Alexia Putellas named the player of the tournament. The world champions won all three matches but needed a late header from Julie Ertz to beat Spain.

LEUPOLZ MOVES TO LONDON

The current season may be in suspension but Chelsea are already looking to 2020-21, with the WSL club announcing the signing of Bayern Munich captain Melanie Leupolz.

World Service

Club football

How league tables stood when games were halted in March because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
Beneath the tables are recent previous league champions.

EUROPE

ALBANIA

2019-20 - 36-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
KF Tirana	26	16	5	5	48	25	53
Kukesi	26	12	8	6	39	22	44
Laci	26	12	5	9	38	24	41
Skenderbeu	26	12	5	9	30	35	41
Teuta	26	10	10	6	25	23	40
Partizani	26	11	5	10	32	27	38
Bylis	26	8	12	6	34	25	36
Vllaznia	26	9	8	9	25	21	35
Luftetari	26	2	8	16	12	48	14
Flamurtari	26	1	8	17	17	50	11

2009-10 Dinamo Tirana
2010-11 Skenderbeu
2011-12 Skenderbeu
2012-13 Skenderbeu
2013-14 Skenderbeu
2014-15 Skenderbeu
2015-16 Skenderbeu
2016-17 Kukesi
2017-18 Skenderbeu
2018-19 Partizani

ARMENIA

2019-20 - REGULAR - 18 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ararat-Arm	17	10	3	4	30	15	33
Alashkert	17	9	4	4	33	19	31
Lori	17	8	5	4	25	18	29
Shirak	17	8	4	5	24	16	28
Ararat Y'van	17	8	4	5	24	18	28
Noah	17	8	3	6	24	19	27
Pyunik	17	7	2	8	35	33	23
Urartu	17	6	5	6	22	23	23
Gandzasar	18	4	6	8	20	25	18
FC Yerevan	18	0	0	18	11	62	0

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 4 to form relegation group (but FC Yerevan had withdrawn from the league already)

2010 Pyunik
2011 Ulisses
2012-13 Shirak
2013-14 Banants
2014-15 Pyunik
2015-16 Alashkert
2016-17 Alashkert
2017-18 Alashkert
2018-19 Ararat-Armenia

AUSTRIA

2019-20 - REGULAR - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LASK	22	17	3	2	50	20	54
Salzburg	22	14	6	2	74	26	48
Rapid	22	11	7	4	47	26	40
Wolfsberger	22	11	5	6	50	27	38
Sturm	22	9	5	8	37	28	32
Hartberg	22	8	5	9	36	50	29
Austria V	22	5	10	7	33	36	25
Altach	22	7	3	12	34	44	24
Admira	22	4	7	11	22	43	19
WSG Tirol	22	5	4	13	26	50	19
Mattersburg	22	5	3	14	26	52	18
St Polten	22	3	8	11	21	54	17

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 6 to form relegation group

2009-10 Salzburg
2010-11 Sturm Graz
2011-12 Salzburg
2012-13 Austria Vienna
2013-14 Salzburg
2014-15 Salzburg
2015-16 Salzburg
2016-17 Salzburg
2017-18 Salzburg
2018-19 Salzburg

AZERBAIJAN

2019-20 - 28-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qarabag	20	13	6	1	34	7	45
Neftchi	20	10	7	3	33	14	37
Keshla	20	8	6	6	27	21	30
Sumqayit	20	6	5	9	24	32	23
Zira	20	6	5	9	25	37	23
Sabah	20	5	6	9	19	27	21
Sabail	20	5	5	10	16	30	20
Qabala	20	5	4	11	25	35	19

2009-10 Inter
2010-11 Neftchi
2011-12 Neftchi
2012-13 Neftchi
2013-14 Qarabag
2014-15 Qarabag
2015-16 Qarabag
2016-17 Qarabag
2017-18 Qarabag
2018-19 Qarabag

BELGIUM

2019-20 - REGULAR - 30 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge	29	21	7	1	58	14	70
Gent	29	16	7	6	59	34	55
Charleroi	29	15	9	5	49	23	54
Antwerp	29	15	8	6	49	32	53
Standard	29	14	7	8	47	32	49
Mechelen	29	13	5	11	46	43	44
Genk	29	13	5	11	45	42	44
Anderlecht	29	11	10	8	45	29	43
Z Waregem	29	10	6	13	41	49	36
Mouscron	29	9	9	11	38	40	36
Kortrijk	29	9	6	14	40	44	33
St Truiden	29	9	6	14	33	50	33
Eupen	29	8	6	15	28	51	30
Cercle Brugge	29	7	2	20	27	54	23
Oostende	29	6	4	19	29	58	22
Waasland-B	29	5	5	19	21	60	20

The league season was halted after 29 rounds and Club Brugge were set to be confirmed as champions at a league general assembly meeting on 15 April

2009-10 Anderlecht
2010-11 Genk
2011-12 Anderlecht
2012-13 Anderlecht
2013-14 Anderlecht
2014-15 Gent
2015-16 Club Brugge
2016-17 Anderlecht
2017-18 Club Brugge
2018-19 Genk

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

2019-20 - 33-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FK Sarajevo	22	13	6	3	38	19	45
Zeljezni'r	22	12	6	4	43	21	42
Zrinjski	22	11	5	6	30	12	38
Borac	22	10	6	6	29	23	36
Tuzla City	22	10	5	7	27	29	35
Radnik	22	10	4	8	34	21	34
Siroki Br'g	22	8	8	6	31	26	32
Velez	22	9	5	8	25	23	32
Sloboda T	22	4	9	9	21	35	21
Mladost DK	22	4	6	12	21	35	18
Celik	22	5	5	12	17	33	17
Zvijezda 09	22	1	5	16	12	51	8

Celik had 3pts deducted

2009-10 Zeljeznicar
2010-11 Borac Banja Luka
2011-12 Zeljeznicar
2012-13 Zeljeznicar
2013-14 Zrinjski
2014-15 FK Sarajevo
2015-16 Zrinjski
2016-17 Zrinjski
2017-18 Zrinjski
2018-19 FK Sarajevo

BULGARIA

2019-20 - REGULAR - 26 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ludogorets	23	16	7	0	42	10	55
Lokomotiv P	24	13	7	4	46	22	46
Levski	24	13	7	4	40	17	46
CSKA	24	13	7	4	39	16	46
Slavia	24	12	6	6	31	23	42
Cherno More	24	9	10	5	30	21	37
Beroe	24	12	1	11	37	32	37
Botev P'div	24	8	6	10	25	27	30
Arda	23	7	8	8	25	29	29
Etar	24	5	9	10	26	40	24
Tsarko Selo	24	6	4	14	22	39	22
Botev V'sa	24	4	7	13	20	45	19
Dunav	24	4	6	14	18	44	18
Vitosha	24	1	3	20	15	51	6

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 8 to form relegation group

2009-10 Litex Lovech
2010-11 Litex Lovech
2011-12 Ludogorets
2012-13 Ludogorets
2013-14 Ludogorets
2014-15 Ludogorets
2015-16 Ludogorets
2016-17 Ludogorets
2017-18 Ludogorets
2018-19 Ludogorets

CROATIA

2019-20 - 36-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	26	21	2	3	51	11	65
Rijeka	26	14	5	7	42	31	47
Lokomotiva	26	14	4	8	41	28	46
Hajduk	26	13	6	7	41	23	45
Osijek	26	11	9	6	38	25	42
Gorica	26	9	8	9	32	40	35
Slaven	26	7	5	14	23	43	26
Istra 1961	26	4	7	15	19	40	19
Inter	26	3	8	15	28	51	17
Varazdin	26	3	8	15	18	41	17

2009-10 Dinamo Zagreb
2010-11 Dinamo Zagreb
2011-12 Dinamo Zagreb
2012-13 Dinamo Zagreb
2013-14 Dinamo Zagreb
2014-15 Dinamo Zagreb
2015-16 Dinamo Zagreb
2016-17 Rijeka
2017-18 Dinamo Zagreb
2018-19 Dinamo Zagreb

CYPRUS

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular-season record

2019-20 - CHAMP GRP - 32-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Omonia N	23	13	7	3	34	13	46
Anorthosis	23	14	4	5	45	21	46
APOEL	23	11	7	5	36	16	40
Apollon	23	12	3	8	39	30	39
AEK	23	9	8	6	36	29	35
AEL	23	8	7	8	27	29	31

2019-20 - REL GRP - 32-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pafos	23	8	6	9	26	28	30
Nea Salamina	23	7	5	11	27	38	26
Olympiakos	23	5	10	8	28	35	25
ENP	23	5	8	10	29	43	23
Ethnikos	23	5	6	12	31	46	21
Doxa	23	3	5	15	15	45	14

2009-10 Omonia Nicosia
2010-11 APOEL
2011-12 AEL
2012-13 APOEL
2013-14 APOEL
2014-15 APOEL
2015-16 APOEL
2016-17 APOEL
2017-18 APOEL
2018-19 APOEL

CZECH REPUBLIC

2019-20 - REGULAR - 30 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia	24	18	4	2	48	8	58
V Plzen	24	15	5	4	45	20	50
Jablonec	24	11	7	6	42	31	40
B Ostrava	24	11	5	8	36	27	38
M Boleslav	24	11	4	9	42	37	37
Slovacko	24	10	7	7	30	27	37
S Liberec	23	11	3	9	42	31	36
C Bud'vice	24	11	3	10	39	38	36
Sparta	24	9	8	7	42	32	35
S Olomouc	24	7	11	6	31	29	32
Boh 1905	24	7	6	11	25	37	27
Teplice	23	5	9	9	19	35	24
Karvina	24	5	8	11	20	30	23
Zlin	24	6	4	14	22	40	22
Opava	24	4	5	15	11	41	17
Pribram	24	3	5	16	15	46	14

Top 6 to form championship group; teams placed 7th-10th in Europa League place play-offs; bottom 6 to form relegation group

2010-11 Viktoria Plzen
2011-12 Slovan Liberec
2012-13 Viktoria Plzen
2013-14 Sparta Prague
2014-15 Viktoria Plzen
2015-16 Viktoria Plzen
2016-17 Slavia Prague
2017-18 Viktoria Plzen
2018-19 Slavia Prague

DENMARK

2019-20 - REGULAR - 26 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Midtjylland	24	20	2	2	41	13	62
Cop'hagen	24	16	2	6	41	27	50
AGF	23	12	4	7	37	25	40
Brondby	24	12	3	9	44	34	39
Nordsj'land	24	11	5	8	46	34	38
AaB	24	11	4	9	41	29	37
Randers	23	10	4	9	37	31	34
Lyngby	24	9	4	11	28	39	31
OB	24	8	6	10	31	28	30
Horsens	24	8	4	12	21	42	28
Son'jyskE	24	6	8	10	29	41	26
Hobro	24	2	13	9	22	33	19
Esbjerg	24	4	5	15	20	40	17
Silkeborg	24	3	6	15	29	51	15

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 8 to form relegation group

2009-10 Copenhagen
2010-11 Copenhagen
2011-12 Nordsjaelland
2012-13 Copenhagen
2013-14 AaB
2014-15 Midtjylland
2015-16 Copenhagen
2016-17 Copenhagen
2017-18 Midtjylland
2018-19 Copenhagen

ENGLAND

2019-20 - 38-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	29	27	1	1	66	21	82
Man City	28	18	3	7	68	31	57
Leicester	29	16	5	8	58	28	53
Chelsea	29	14	6	9	51	39	48
Man United	29	12	9	8	44	30	45
Wolves	29	10	13	6	41	34	43
Sheffield U	28	11	10	7	30	25	43
Tottenham	29	11	8	10	47	40	41
Arsenal	28	9	13	6	40	36	40
Burnley	29	11	6	12	34	40	39
Crystal Pal	29	10	9	10	26	32	39
Everton	29	10	7	12	37	46	37
Newcastle	29	9	8	12	25	41	35
S'thampton	29	10	4	15	35	52	34
Brighton	29	6	11	12	32	40	29
West Ham	29	7	6	16	35	50	27
Watford	29	6	9	14	27	44	27
Bournem'th	29	7	6	16	29	47	27
Aston Villa	28	7	4	17	34	56	25
Norwich	29	5	6	18	25	52	21

2009-10 Chelsea
2010-11 Manchester United
2011-12 Manchester City
2012-13 Manchester United
2013-14 Manchester City
2014-15 Chelsea
2015-16 Leicester City
2016-17 Chelsea
2017-18 Manchester City
2018-19 Manchester City

FRANCE

2019-20 - 38-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG	27	22	2	3	75	24	68
Marseille	28	16	8	4	41	29	56
Rennes	28	15	5	8	38	24	50
Lille	28	15	4	9	35	27	49
Reims	28	10	11	7	26	21	41
Nice	28	11	8	9	41	38	41
Lyon	28	11	7	10	42	27	40
Montpellier	28	11	7	10	35	34	40
Monaco	28	11	7	10	44	44	40
Angers	28	11	6	11	28	33	39
Strasbourg	27	11	5	11	32	32	38
Bordeaux	28	9	10	9	40	34	37
Nantes	28	11	4	13	28	31	37
Brest	28	8	10	10	34	37	34
Metz	28	8	10	10	27	35	34
Dijon	28	7	9	12	27	37	30
St-Etienne	28	8	6	14	29	45	30
Nimes	28	7	6	15	29	44	27
Amiens	28	4	11	13	31	50	23
Toulouse	28	3	4	21	22	58	13

2009-10 Marseille
2010-11 Lille
2011-12 Montpellier
2012-13 Paris Saint-Germain
2013-14 Paris Saint-Germain
2014-15 Paris Saint-Germain
2015-16 Paris Saint-Germain
2016-17 Monaco
2017-18 Paris Saint-Germain
2018-19 Paris Saint-Germain

GERMANY

2019-20 - 34-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern M	25	17	4	4	73	26	55
B Dortmund	25	15	6	4	68	33	51
RB Leipzig	25	14	8	3	62	26	50
M'gladbach	25	15	4	6	49	30	49
Leverkusen	25	14	5	6	45	30	47
Schalke	25	9	10	6	33	36	37
Wolfsburg	25	9	9	7	34	30	36
Freiburg	25	10	6	9	34	35	36
Hoffenheim	25	10	5	10	35	43	35
Cologne	25	10	2	13	39	45	32
Union	25	9	3	13	32	41	30
Eintracht F	24	8	4	12	38	41	28
Hertha	25	7	7	11	32	48	28
Augsburg	25	7	6	12	36	52	27
Mainz	25	8	2	15	34	53	26
Fortuna D	25	5	7	13	27	50	22
Werder B	24	4	6	14	27	55	18
Paderborn	25	4	4	17	30	54	16

2009-10 Bayern Munich
2010-11 Borussia Dortmund
2011-12 Borussia Dortmund
2012-13 Bayern Munich
2013-14 Bayern Munich
2014-15 Bayern Munich
2015-16 Bayern Munich
2016-17 Bayern Munich
2017-18 Bayern Munich
2018-19 Bayern Munich

GREECE

2019-20 - REGULAR - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	26	20	6	0	53	9	66
PAOK	26	18	5	3	50	23	52
AEK	26	15	6	5	42	22	51
Panath'kos	26	12	8	6	35	23	44
OFI	26	10	4	12	35	35	34
Aris	26	8	10	8	38	32	34
Atromitos	26	9	5	12	31	36	32
Larissa	26	7	9	10	28	33	30
Asteras	26	8	6	12	33	37	30
Lamia	26	5	12	9	19	33	27
Volos NFC	26	7	6	13	23	42	27
Xanthi	26	8	6	12	21	32	18
Panet'kos	26	3	8	15	20	42	17
Panionios	26	4	5	17	16	45	11

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 8 to form relegation group.
PAOK had 7pts deducted; Xanthi had 12pts deducted; Panionios had 6pts deducted

2009-10 Panathinaikos
2010-11 Olympiakos
2011-12 Olympiakos
2012-13 Olympiakos
2013-14 Olympiakos
2014-15 Olympiakos
2015-16 Olympiakos
2016-17 Olympiakos
2017-18 AEK Athens
2018-19 PAOK Salonika

HOLLAND

2019-20 - 34-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	25	18	2	5	68	23	56
AZ	25	18	2	5	54	17	56
Feyenoord	25	14	8	3	50	35	50
PSV	26	14	7	5	54	28	49
Willem II	26	13	5	8	37	34	44
Utrecht	25	12	5	8	50	34	41
Vitesse	26	12	5	9	45	35	41
Heracles	26	10	6	10	40	34	36
Groningen	26	10	5	11	27	26	35
Heerenveen	26	8	9	9	41	41	33
Sparta	26	9	6	11	41	45	33
Emmen	26	9	5	12	32	45	32
VVV	26	8	4	14	24	51	28
Twente	26	7	6	13	34	46	27
Zwolle	26	7	5	14	37	55	26
Fortuna	26	6	8	12	29	52	26
Den Haag	26	4	7	15	25	54	19
RKC	26	4	3	19	27	60	15

2009-10 Twente Enschede
2010-11 Ajax
2011-12 Ajax
2012-13 Ajax
2013-14 Ajax
2014-15 PSV Eindhoven
2015-16 PSV Eindhoven
2016-17 Feyenoord
2017-18 PSV Eindhoven
2018-19 Ajax

HUNGARY

2019-20 - 33-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ferencvaros	23	16	5	2	44	19	53
Fehervar	25	15	5	5	47	23	50
Mezokovesd	25	13	6	6	37	21	45
Puskas Akad	25	10	9	6	39	31	39
Diosgyor	25	11	4	10	35	33	37
Honved	25	9	7	9	25	32	34
Kisvarda	25	9	4	12	35	36	31
Debrecen	24	9	3	12	36	44	30
Ujpest	24	8	5	11	31	37	29
Paks	25	8	4	13	30	42	28
Zalaeg'zeg	25	7	7	11	34	37	28
Kaposvar	25	3	1	21	19	57	10

2009-10 Debrecen
2010-11 Videoton
2011-12 Debrecen
2012-13 Gyor
2013-14 Debrecen
2014-15 Videoton
2015-16 Ferencvaros
2016-17 Honved
2017-18 Videoton
2018-19 Ferencvaros

ISRAEL

2019-20 - REGULAR - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mac Tel Aviv	26	19	7	0	48	7	64
Mac Haifa	26	18	4	4	58	20	58
Beitar Jer'm	26	15	4	7	42	25	49
Beer Sheva	26	13	5	8	33	23	44
Hap Tel Aviv	26	11	5	10	24	36	38
Hap Haifa	26	10	7	9	26	30	37
Bnei Yehuda	26	9	7	10	23	26	34
Hadera	26	9	7	10	24	28	34
Netanya	26	8	7	11	23	32	31
Ashdod	26	6	10	10	30	33	28
Kfar Saba	26	7	5	14	22	35	26
Kiryat Shm'a	26	6	4	16	24	35	22
Nes Tziona	26	5	6	15	17	40	21
Ra'anana	26	2	10	14	20	44	16

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 8 to form relegation group

2009-10 Hapoel Tel Aviv
2010-11 Maccabi Haifa
2011-12 Kiryat Shmona
2012-13 Maccabi Tel Aviv
2013-14 Maccabi Tel Aviv
2014-15 Maccabi Tel Aviv
2015-16 Beer Sheva
2016-17 Beer Sheva
2017-18 Beer Sheva
2018-19 Maccabi Tel Aviv

ITALY

2019-20 - 38-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	26	20	3	3	50	24	63
Lazio	26	19	5	2	60	23	62
Inter	25	16	6	3	49	24	54
Atalanta	25	14	6	5	70	34	48
Roma	26	13	6	7	51	35	45
Napoli	26	11	6	9	41	36	39
Milan	26	10	6	10	28	34	36
Verona	25	9	8	8	29	26	35
Parma	25	10	5	10	32	31	35
Bologna	26	9	7	10	38	42	34
Sassuolo	25	9	5	11	41	39	32
Cagliari	25	8	8	9	41	40	32
Fiorentina	26	7	9	10	32	36	30
Udinese	26	7	7	12	21	37	28
Torino	25	8	3	14	28	45	27
Sampdoria	25	7	5	13	28	44	26
Genoa	26	6	7	13	31	47	25
Lecce	26	6	7	13	34	56	25
SPAL	26	5	3	18	20	44	18
Brescia	26	4	4	18	22	49	16

2009-10 Internazionale
2010-11 Milan
2011-12 Juventus
2012-13 Juventus
2013-14 Juventus
2014-15 Juventus
2015-16 Juventus
2016-17 Juventus
2017-18 Juventus
2018-19 Juventus

LUXEMBOURG

2019-20 - 26-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fola	17	12	3	2	41	17	39
Progres	17	11	4	2	43	17	37
Differd'ge	17	11	2	4	36	25	35
Petange	17	10	3	4	34	23	33
F91	17	8	2	7	38	24	26
Strassen	17	7	5	5	30	26	26
Racing	17	6	7	4	32	27	25
Jeunesse E	17	5	4	8	24	34	19
Victoria	17	5	3	9	23	35	18
Etzella	17	5	2	10	22	34	17
Hostert	17	5	1	11	17	37	16
Mondorf	17	3	6	8	22	28	15
Rodange	17	4	3	10	21	37	15
Blue Boys	17	3	3	11	20	39	12

2009-10 Jeunesse Esch
2010-11 F91 Dudelange
2011-12 F91 Dudelange
2012-13 Fola Esch
2013-14 F91 Dudelange
2014-15 Fola Esch
2015-16 F91 Dudelange
2016-17 F91 Dudelange
2017-18 F91 Dudelange
2018-19 F91 Dudelange

MALTA

2019-20 - 26-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Floriana	20	12	5	3	38	15	41
Valletta	20	11	5	4	32	22	38
Hibernians	20	11	4	5	34	20	37
Sirens	20	10	5	5	30	26	35
Birkirkara	20	9	6	5	30	20	33
Gzira	20	9	5	6	35	19	32
Balzan	20	8	4	8	33	29	28
Mosta	20	9	1	10	29	35	28
Hamrun	20	6	7	7	24	25	25
Sliema	20	7	3	10	24	22	24
Gudja	20	6	6	8	24	30	24
Santa Lucia	20	6	5	9	24	33	23
Senglea	20	3	7	10	21	39	16
Tarxien	20	1	1	18	18	61	4

2009-10 Birkirkara
2010-11 Valletta
2011-12 Valletta
2012-13 Birkirkara
2013-14 Valletta
2014-15 Hibernians
2015-16 Valletta
2016-17 Hibernians
2017-18 Valletta
2018-19 Valletta

MONTENEGRO

2019-20 - 36-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buducnost	23	17	3	3	49	20	54
Sutjeska	23	12	7	4	45	23	43
Iskra	23	10	7	6	29	24	37
Rudar	23	10	3	10	36	41	33
Zeta	23	7	9	7	21	24	30
FK Podg'ica	23	6	11	6	26	23	29
OFK Titog'd	23	6	5	12	23	29	23
Petrovac	23	6	5	12	19	41	23
Kom	23	5	7	11	29	35	22
Grbalj	23	3	9	11	20	37	18

2010-11 Mogren
2011-12 Buducnost
2012-13 Sutjeska
2013-14 Sutjeska
2014-15 Rudar
2015-16 Mladost Podgorica
2016-17 Buducnost
2017-18 Sutjeska
2018-19 Sutjeska

NORTH MACEDONIA

2019-20 - 36-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vardar S	23	13	7	3	33	14	46
Sileks	23	10	6	7	24	21	36
Shkendija	23	10	5	8	38	20	35
Renova	23	9	4	10	25	33	31
Shkupi	23	7	8	8	28	28	29
Makedonija	23	7	8	8	24	28	29
Akad Pandev	23	7	7	9	20	20	28
Rabotnicki	23	8	4	11	21	29	28
Borec	23	7	6	10	20	31	27
Struga	23	6	7	10	19	28	25

2010-11 Shkendija
2011-12 Vardar Skopje
2012-13 Vardar Skopje
2013-14 Rabotnicki
2014-15 Vardar Skopje
2015-16 Vardar Skopje
2016-17 Vardar Skopje
2017-18 Shkendija
2018-19 Shkendija

NORTHERN IRELAND

2019-20 - REGULAR - 33 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Linfield	31	22	3	6	71	24	69
Coleraine	31	19	8	4	64	24	65
Crusaders	31	17	8	6	66	30	59
Cliftonville	31	18	5	8	48	22	59
Glentoran	31	17	7	7	60	33	58
Larne	31	16	8	7	59	29	56
Glenavon	31	10	5	16	46	71	35
Carrick	31	10	2	19	34	47	32
Dungannon	31	8	6	17	36	76	30
Ballymena	31	7	6	18	34	54	27
Warrenp'nt	31	5	3	23	26	85	18
Institute	31	2	9	20	23	72	15

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 6 to form relegation group

2010-11 Linfield
2011-12 Linfield
2012-13 Cliftonville
2013-14 Cliftonville
2014-15 Crusaders
2015-16 Crusaders
2016-17 Linfield
2017-18 Crusaders
2018-19 Linfield

POLAND

2019-20 - REGULAR - 30 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia	26	16	3	7	54	26	51
Piast	26	13	4	9	28	25	43
Lech	26	11	9	6	45	25	42
Cracovia	26	13	3	10	35	25	42
Slask	26	11	9	6	34	29	42
Pogon Sz'in	26	11	8	7	27	23	41
Lechia	26	10	8	8	32	33	38
Jagiellonia	26	10	7	9	35	35	37
Rakow	26	11	3	12	32	37	36
Wisla Plock	26	10	6	10	32	41	36
Zaglebie L	26	9	6	11	41	40	33
Gornik Z'ze	26	8	9	9	34	36	33
Wisla Kr'w	26	9	4	13	33	38	31
Korona	26	7	5	14	15	30	26
Arka	26	6	7	13	22	37	25
LKS	26	5	5	16	25	44	20

Top 8 to form championship group; bottom 8 to form relegation group

2009-10 Lech Poznan
2010-11 Wisla Krakow
2011-12 Slask Wroclaw
2012-13 Legia Warsaw
2013-14 Legia Warsaw
2014-15 Lech Poznan
2015-16 Legia Warsaw
2016-17 Legia Warsaw
2017-18 Legia Warsaw
2018-19 Piast Gliwice

PORTUGAL

2019-20 - 34-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	24	19	3	2	50	16	60
Benfica	24	19	2	3	52	14	59
Braga	24	14	4	6	41	26	46
Sporting L	24	13	3	8	37	26	42
Rio Ave	24	10	8	6	32	23	38
V Guimaraes	24	10	7	7	40	25	37
Famalicao	24	10	7	7	38	40	37
Moreirense	24	7	9	8	34	32	30
Gil Vicente	24	7	9	8	25	29	30
Santa Clara	24	8	6	10	19	26	30
Boavista	24	7	8	9	19	23	29
V Setubal	24	6	10	8	17	27	28
Bel'ses SAD	24	7	5	12	19	38	26
Tondela	24	6	7	11	20	30	25
Maritimo	24	5	9	10	22	32	24
P Ferreira	24	6	4	14	18	34	22
Portim'nse	24	2	10	12	16	34	16
Aves	24	4	1	19	23	47	13

2009-10 Benfica
2010-11 Porto
2011-12 Porto
2012-13 Porto
2013-14 Benfica
2014-15 Benfica
2015-16 Benfica
2016-17 Benfica
2017-18 Porto
2018-19 Benfica

ROMANIA

Division split after 26-round regular season; teams carried forward half their points (rounded up) only

2019-20 - CHAMP GRP - 10 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CFR	2	1	1	0	2	1	30
FCSB	2	1	1	0	6	3	26
U Craiova	2	1	0	1	3	5	26
Astra	2	1	0	1	2	2	24
Botosani	2	0	1	1	2	3	24
Gaz Metan	2	0	1	1	1	2	23

2019-20 - REL GRP - 14 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Viitorul	2	1	1	0	3	2	24
Sepsi	2	0	2	0	2	2	19
Dinamo	2	0	0	2	0	2	17
Hermanns't	2	1	1	0	2	1	17
Poli Iasi	2	1	1	0	2	1	15
Clinceni	2	1	0	1	3	3	14
Chindia	2	0	1	1	1	2	14
Voluntari	2	0	2	0	1	1	12

2009-10 CFR Cluj
2010-11 Otelul Galati
2011-12 CFR Cluj
2012-13 Steaua Bucharest
2013-14 Steaua Bucharest
2014-15 Steaua Bucharest
2015-16 Astra Giurgiu
2016-17 Viitorul Constanta
2017-18 CFR Cluj
2018-19 CFR Cluj

RUSSIA

2019-20 - 30-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit	22	15	5	2	44	10	50
Lokomotiv	22	12	5	5	32	25	41
Krasnodar	22	11	8	3	36	22	41
Rostov	22	11	5	6	39	34	38
CSKA	22	10	6	6	29	22	36
Dynamo	22	8	6	8	20	25	30
Arsenal	22	8	4	10	25	27	28
Spartak M	22	8	4	10	24	23	28
Ufa	22	6	9	7	16	19	27
Ural	22	6	7	9	26	41	25
Tambov	22	7	4	11	26	27	25
Sochi	22	6	6	10	26	28	24
Orenburg	22	6	5	11	26	36	23
Rubin	22	5	8	9	12	22	23
Krylya S'tov	22	6	4	12	22	29	22
Akhmat	22	4	8	10	16	29	20

2010 Zenit St Petersburg
2011-12 Zenit St Petersburg
2012-13 CSKA Moscow
2013-14 CSKA Moscow
2014-15 Zenit St Petersburg
2015-16 CSKA Moscow
2016-17 Spartak Moscow
2017-18 Lokomotiv Moscow
2018-19 Zenit St Petersburg

SCOTLAND

2019-20 - REGULAR - 33 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	30	26	2	2	89	19	80
Rangers	29	21	4	4	64	19	67
Motherwell	30	14	4	12	41	38	46
Aberdeen	30	12	9	9	40	36	45
Livingston	30	10	9	11	41	39	39
Hibernian	30	9	10	11	42	49	37
St Johnstone	29	8	12	9	28	46	36
Kilmarnock	30	9	6	15	31	41	33
St Mirren	30	7	8	15	24	41	29
Ross County	30	7	8	15	29	60	29
Hamilton	30	6	9	15	30	50	27
Hearts	30	4	11	15	31	52	23

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 6 to form relegation group

2009-10 Rangers
2010-11 Rangers
2011-12 Celtic
2012-13 Celtic
2013-14 Celtic
2014-15 Celtic
2015-16 Celtic
2016-17 Celtic
2017-18 Celtic
2018-19 Celtic

SERBIA

2019-20 - REGULAR - 30 rounds

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star	26	22	3	1	56	14	69
Partizan	26	18	4	4	59	19	58
Vojvodina	26	17	4	5	42	23	55
TSC	26	14	8	4	47	28	50
Cukaricki	26	14	5	7	37	29	47
Radnicki N	26	13	3	10	39	30	42
Spartak	26	11	4	11	37	42	37
Mladost	26	11	4	11	26	34	37
Vozdovac	26	10	5	11	40	40	35
Radnik	26	8	5	13	29	40	29
Proleter	26	7	7	12	25	34	28
Napredak	26	7	5	14	29	39	26
Javor	26	5	9	12	34	51	24
Indija	26	5	4	17	22	41	19
Rad	26	4	3	19	20	50	15
Macva	26	2	7	17	15	43	13

Top 8 to form championship group; bottom 8 to form relegation group

2009-10 Partizan Belgrade
2010-11 Partizan Belgrade
2011-12 Partizan Belgrade
2012-13 Partizan Belgrade
2013-14 Red Star Belgrade
2014-15 Partizan Belgrade
2015-16 Red Star Belgrade
2016-17 Partizan Belgrade
2017-18 Red Star Belgrade
2018-19 Red Star Belgrade

SLOVAKIA

2019-20 - REGULAR - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovan	22	17	4	1	46	11	55
Zilina	22	13	6	3	38	17	45
D'ka Streda	22	11	5	6	31	25	38
Michalovce	22	8	6	8	28	32	30
Spartak T'va	22	9	3	10	25	26	30
Ruzomberok	22	6	10	6	25	27	28
Trencin	22	7	6	9	39	35	27
Z Moravce	22	6	8	8	22	28	26
Senica	22	6	6	10	24	33	24
Sered	22	5	7	10	23	34	22
Nitra	22	5	4	13	17	31	19
Pohronie	22	3	7	12	19	38	16

Top 6 to form championship group; bottom 6 to form relegation group

2010-11 Slovan Bratislava
2011-12 Zilina
2012-13 Slovan Bratislava
2013-14 Slovan Bratislava
2014-15 Trencin
2015-16 Trencin
2016-17 Zilina
2017-18 Spartak Trnava
2018-19 Slovan Bratislava

SLOVENIA

2019-20 - 36-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpija	25	15	5	5	52	29	50
Celje	25	12	9	4	53	25	45
Aluminij	25	13	6	6	44	24	45
Maribor	25	12	7	6	41	26	43
Mura	25	9	11	5	37	30	38
Tabor Sez'a	25	8	5	12	29	37	29
Bravo	25	7	7	11	31	43	28
Triglav	25	8	3	14	32	59	27
Domzale	25	7	5	13	34	47	26
Rudar	25	0	10	15	23	56	10

2009-10 Koper
2010-11 Maribor
2011-12 Maribor
2012-13 Maribor
2013-14 Maribor
2014-15 Maribor
2015-16 Olimpija Ljubljana
2016-17 Maribor
2017-18 Olimpija Ljubljana
2018-19 Maribor

SPAIN

2019-20 - 38-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	27	18	4	5	63	31	58
Real Madrid	27	16	8	3	49	19	56
Sevilla	27	13	8	6	39	29	47
R Sociedad	27	14	4	9	45	33	46
Getafe	27	13	7	7	37	25	46
Atl Madrid	27	11	12	4	31	21	45
Valencia	27	11	9	7	38	39	42
Villarreal	27	11	5	11	44	38	38
Granada	27	11	5	11	33	32	38
Ath Bilbao	27	9	10	8	29	23	37
Osasuna	27	8	10	9	34	38	34
Betis	27	8	9	10	38	43	33
Levante	27	10	3	14	32	40	33
Alaves	27	8	8	11	29	37	32
Valladolid	27	6	11	10	23	33	29
Eibar	27	7	6	14	27	41	27
Celta Vigo	27	5	11	11	22	34	26
Mallorca	27	7	4	16	28	44	25
Leganes	27	5	8	14	21	39	23
Espanyol	27	4	8	15	23	46	20

2009-10 Barcelona
2010-11 Barcelona
2011-12 Real Madrid
2012-13 Barcelona
2013-14 Atletico Madrid
2014-15 Barcelona
2015-16 Barcelona
2016-17 Real Madrid
2017-18 Barcelona
2018-19 Barcelona

SWITZERLAND

2019-20 - 36-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Gallen	23	14	3	6	51	31	45
Young Boys	23	13	6	4	46	31	45
Basle	23	12	4	7	48	24	40
Servette	23	10	7	6	38	23	37
Zurich	23	9	5	9	28	45	32
Lucerne	23	9	4	10	25	30	31
Lugano	23	6	8	9	24	27	26
Sion	23	6	5	12	28	41	23
Xamax	23	3	10	10	25	38	19
Thun	23	5	4	14	23	46	19

2009-10 Basle
2010-11 Basle
2011-12 Basle
2012-13 Basle
2013-14 Basle
2014-15 Basle
2015-16 Basle
2016-17 Basle
2017-18 Young Boys
2018-19 Young Boys

TURKEY

2019-20 - 34-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Trabzons'r	26	15	8	3	59	28	53
Basaksehir	26	15	8	3	50	25	53
Galatas'ay	26	14	8	4	44	20	50
Sivasspor	26	14	7	5	47	29	49
Besiktas	26	13	5	8	40	32	44
Alanyaspor	26	12	7	7	44	25	43
Fenerbahce	26	11	7	8	46	34	40
Goztepe	26	10	7	9	31	30	37
Gaziantep	26	8	8	10	36	41	32
Denizlispor	26	8	7	11	26	34	31
Antalyas'r	26	7	9	10	29	43	30
Genclerb'gi	26	7	7	12	33	44	28
Kasimpasa	26	7	5	14	38	50	26
Konyaspor	26	5	11	10	21	33	26
Malatyas'r	26	6	7	13	38	40	25
Rizespor	26	7	4	15	26	44	25
Ankarag'u	26	5	8	13	23	45	23
Kayseris'r	26	5	7	14	28	62	22

2009-10 Bursaspor
2010-11 Fenerbahce
2011-12 Galatasaray
2012-13 Galatasaray
2013-14 Fenerbahce
2014-15 Galatasaray
2015-16 Besiktas
2016-17 Besiktas
2017-18 Galatasaray
2018-19 Galatasaray

UKRAINE

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular-season record

2019-20 - CHAMP GRP - 32-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar	23	19	2	2	59	15	59
Dynamo	23	14	4	5	45	18	46
Zorya	23	14	4	5	40	18	46
Desna	23	13	4	6	37	16	43
Oleksandria	23	12	4	7	34	25	40
Kolos	23	8	2	13	27	43	26

2019-20 - REL GRP - 32-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dnipro-1	23	8	4	11	28	34	28
Mariupol	23	6	7	10	21	37	25
FC Lviv	23	5	6	12	17	36	21
Vorskla	23	6	3	14	16	39	21
Olimpik	23	5	4	14	18	38	19
Karpaty	23	2	8	13	18	41	14

2009-10 Shakhtar Donetsk
2010-11 Shakhtar Donetsk
2011-12 Shakhtar Donetsk
2012-13 Shakhtar Donetsk
2013-14 Shakhtar Donetsk
2014-15 Dynamo Kiev
2015-16 Dynamo Kiev
2016-17 Shakhtar Donetsk
2017-18 Shakhtar Donetsk
2018-19 Shakhtar Donetsk

WALES

Division split after 22-round regular season

2019-20 - CHAMP GRP - 32-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Connah's Q	26	16	8	2	47	19	56
New Saints	26	16	4	6	69	27	52
Bala	26	15	4	7	53	23	49
Barry	25	12	6	7	35	29	42
Caernarfon	26	11	5	10	36	38	38
Newtown	25	10	5	10	25	30	35

2019-20 - REL GRP - 32-round season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cardiff MU	25	9	8	8	30	29	35
Cefn Druids	25	10	5	10	37	39	35
Ab'ystwyth	26	7	6	13	36	55	27
Penybont	25	5	6	14	29	48	21
Carmarthen	25	4	6	15	28	49	18
Airbus UK	26	4	5	17	28	67	17

2009-10 The New Saints
2010-11 Bangor City
2011-12 The New Saints
2012-13 The New Saints
2013-14 The New Saints
2014-15 The New Saints
2015-16 The New Saints
2016-17 The New Saints
2017-18 The New Saints
2018-19 The New Saints

Internationals

2022 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

The story so far...

AFRICA section
(5 finals places available)

1st round
1st legs - Sep 4-7; **2nd legs** - Sep 8-10, 2019
Botswana v Malawi 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1); Burundi v Tanzania 1-1, 1-1 (aet) (agg 2-2, Tanzania 3-0 on pens); Chad v Sudan 1-3, 0-0 (agg 1-3); Comoros v Togo 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Djibouti v Eswatini 2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1); Eritrea v Namibia 1-2, 0-2 (agg 1-4); Ethiopia v Lesotho 0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Ethiopia on away goals); Gambia v Angola 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3); Liberia v Sierra Leone 3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2); Mauritius v Mozambique 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Sao Tome e Principe v Guinea-Bissau 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3); Seychelles v Rwanda 0-3, 0-7 (agg 0-10); Somalia v Zimbabwe 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3); South Sudan v Equatorial Guinea 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

2nd round draw
(teams ranked 1-26 enter at this stage)
Group A: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Niger
Group B: Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania, Tunisia, Zambia
Group C: Cape Verde Islands, Central African Republic, Liberia, Nigeria
Group D: Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Mozambique
Group E: Kenya, Mali, Rwanda, Uganda
Group F: Angola, Egypt, Gabon, Libya
Group G: Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe
Group H: Congo, Namibia, Senegal, Togo
Group I: Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Sudan
Group J: Benin, DR Congo, Madagascar, Tanzania

• The10 group winners qualify for the 3rd round

3rd round
• The 10 teams will be paired in 5 home-and-away ties, the winners of which will qualify for the World Cup finals

ASIA section
(4 or 5 finals places available, not including the automatic berth for hosts Qatar)

1st round
1st legs - Jun 6/7; **2nd legs** - Jun 11, 2019
Bhutan v Guam 1-0, 0-5 (agg 1-5)
Cambodia v Pakistan 2-0, 2-1 (agg 4-1)
Laos v Bangladesh 0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Macau v Sri Lanka 1-0, 0-3 (awarded) (agg 1-3)
Malaysia v East Timor 7-1, 5-1 (agg 12-2)
Mongolia v Brunei 2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)

2nd round
Group A
Sep 5: Guam 0 Maldives 1; Philippines 2 Syria 5.
Sep 10: Guam 1 Philippines 4; Maldives 0 China 5.
Oct 10: China 7 Guam 0; Syria 2 Maldives 1.
Oct 15: Philippines 0 China 0; Syria 4 Guam 0.
Nov 14: Maldives 1 Philippines 2; Syria 2 China 1.
Nov 19: Maldives 3 Guam 1; Syria 1 Philippines 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Syria	5	5	0	0	14	4	15
China	4	2	1	1	13	2	7
Philippines	5	2	1	2	8	8	7
Maldives	5	2	0	3	6	10	6
Guam	5	0	0	5	2	19	0

Group B
Sep 5: Kuwait 7 Nepal 0; Taiwan 1 Jordan 2.
Sep 10: Kuwait 0 Australia 3; Taiwan 0 Nepal 2.
Oct 10: Australia 5 Nepal 0; Jordan 0 Kuwait 0.
Oct 15: Jordan 3 Nepal 0; Taiwan 1 Australia 7.
Nov 14: Jordan 0 Australia 1; Kuwait 9 Taiwan 0.
Nov 19: Jordan 5 Taiwan 0; Nepal 0 Kuwait 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	4	4	0	0	16	1	12
Kuwait	5	3	1	1	17	3	10
Jordan	5	3	1	1	10	2	10
Nepal	5	1	0	4	2	16	3
Taiwan	5	0	0	5	2	25	0

Group C
Sep 5: Bahrain 1 Iraq 1; Cambodia 1 Hong Kong 1.
Sep 10: Cambodia 0 Bahrain 1; HK 0 Iran 2.
Oct 10: Iran 14 Cambodia 0; Iraq 2 Hong Kong 0.
Oct 15: Bahrain 1 Iran 0; Cambodia 0 Iraq 4.
Nov 14: Hong Kong 0 Bahrain 0; Iraq 2 Iran 1.
Nov 19: HK 2 Cambodia 0; Iraq 0 Bahrain 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iraq	5	3	2	0	9	2	11
Bahrain	5	2	3	0	3	1	9
Iran	4	2	0	2	17	3	6
Hong Kong	5	1	2	2	3	5	5
Cambodia	5	0	1	4	1	22	1

Group D
Sep 5: Palestine 2 Uzbekistan 0; Singapore 2 Yemen 2.
Sep 10: Singapore 2 Palestine 1; Yemen 2 Saudi Arabia 2.
Oct 10: Saudi Arabia 3 Singapore 0; Uzbekistan 5 Yemen 0.
Oct 15: Palestine 0 Saudi Arabia 0; Singapore 1 Uzbekistan 3.
Nov 14: Uzbekistan 2 Saudi Arabia 3; Yemen 1 Palestine 0.
Nov 19: Uzbekistan 2 Palestine 0; Yemen 1 Singapore 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uzbekistan	5	3	0	2	12	6	9
Saudi Arabia	4	2	2	0	8	4	8
Singapore	5	2	1	2	7	10	7
Yemen	5	1	2	2	6	11	5
Palestine	5	1	1	3	3	5	4

Group E
Sep 5: India 1 Oman 2; Qatar 6 Afghanistan 0.
Sep 10: Afghanistan 1 Bangladesh 0; Qatar 0 India 0.
Oct 10: Bangladesh 0 Qatar 2; Oman 3 Afghanistan 0.
Oct 15: India 1 Bangladesh 1; Qatar 2 Oman 1.
Nov 14: Afghanistan 1 India 1; Oman 4 B'desh 1.
Nov 19: Afghanistan 0 Qatar 1; Oman 1 India 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qatar	5	4	1	0	11	1	13
Oman	5	4	0	1	11	4	12
Afghanistan	5	1	1	3	2	11	4
India	5	0	3	2	3	5	3
Bangladesh	4	0	1	3	2	8	1

Group F
Sep 5: Mongolia 1 Myanmar 0; Tajikistan 1 Kyrgyzstan 0.
Sep 10: Mongolia 0 Tajikistan 1; Myanmar 0 Japan 2.
Oct 10: Japan 6 Mongolia 0; Kyrgyzstan 7 Myanmar 0.
Oct 15: Mongolia 1 Kyrgyzstan 2; Tajikistan 0 Japan 3.
Nov 14: Kyrgyzstan 0 Japan 2; Myanmar 4 Tajikistan 3.
Nov 19: Kyrgyzstan 1 Tajikistan 1; Myanmar 1 Mongolia 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	4	4	0	0	13	0	12
Kyrgyzstan	5	2	1	2	10	5	7
Tajikistan	5	2	1	2	6	8	7
Myanmar	5	2	0	3	5	13	6
Mongolia	5	1	0	4	2	10	3

Group G
Sep 5: Indonesia 2 Malaysia 3; Thailand 0 Vietnam 0.
Sep 10: Indonesia 0 Thailand 3; Malaysia 1 United Arab Emirates 2.
Oct 10: United Arab Emirates 5 Indonesia 0; Vietnam 1 Malaysia 0.
Oct 15: Indonesia 1 Vietnam 3; Thailand 2 United Arab Emirates 1.
Nov 14: Malaysia 2 Thailand 1; Vietnam 1 United Arab Emirates 0.
Nov 19: Malaysia 2 Indonesia 0; Vietnam 0 Thailand 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vietnam	5	3	2	0	5	1	11
Malaysia	5	3	0	2	8	6	9
Thailand	5	2	2	1	6	3	8
UAE	4	2	0	2	8	4	6
Indonesia	5	0	0	5	3	16	0

Group H
Sep 5: North Korea 2 Lebanon 0; Sri Lanka 0 Turkmenistan 2.
Sep 10: Sri Lanka 0 North Korea 1; Turkmenistan 0 South Korea 2.
Oct 10: Lebanon 2 Turkmenistan 1; South Korea 8 Sri Lanka 0.
Oct 15: North Korea 0 South Korea 0; Sri Lanka 0 Lebanon 3.
Nov 14: Lebanon 0 South Korea 0; Turkmenistan 3 North Korea 1.
Nov 19: Lebanon 0 North Korea 0; Turkmenistan 2 Sri Lanka 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkmenistan	5	3	0	2	8	5	9
South Korea	4	2	2	0	10	0	8
Lebanon	5	2	2	1	5	3	8
North Korea	5	2	2	1	4	3	8
Sri Lanka	5	0	0	5	0	16	0

• The 8 group winners and the 4 runners-up with the best record will qualify for the 3rd round (Qatar are participating in this stage of the qualifiers even though, as 2022 World Cup hosts, they have an automatic place in the finals. If they win their group or finish as one of the 4 runners-up with the best record, the place they would have taken in the 3rd round will go to the runner-up with the 5th-best record)

3rd round
• The12 teams will be drawn into 2 home-and-away, round-robin groups of 6 - the top 2 in both groups will qualify for the World Cup finals; the 3rd-placed teams will meet in a play-off, the winner of which will enter the inter-confederation play-offs to play for a place in the World Cup finals

CONCACAF section
(3 or 4 finals places available)

• The 6 highest-ranking teams will play in a single home-and-away, round-robin group - the top 3 will qualify for the World Cup finals; the 4th-placed team will meet the winner of the CONCACAF lower-ranking path Final in a play-off, the winner of which will enter the inter-confederation play-offs to play for a place in the World Cup finals

• The lower-ranking 29 teams will be drawn into 8 home-and-away, round-robin groups, the winners of which will enter a knockout phase of quarter-finals, semi-finals and Final. The Final winner will go into the play-off against the higher-ranking group's 4th-placed team

EUROPE section
(13 finals places available)

• All 55 teams will be drawn into10 home-and-away, round-robin groups. The10 group winners will qualify for the World Cup finals; the10 runners-up will enter play-offs to determine the other 3 qualifiers for the finals

OCEANIA section
(0 or 1 finals place available)

• The winner of the section qualifiers will enter the inter-confederation play-offs to play for a place in the World Cup finals

SOUTH AMERICA section
(4 or 5 finals places available)

• The10 teams will play in a single home-and-away, round-robin group. The top 4 will qualify for the World Cup finals; the 5th-placed team will enter the inter-confederation play-offs

FRIENDLIES

Wednesday, March 11
Mar11 - Montego Bay
Jamaica 2 (Fletcher 42, Beckford 79)
Bermuda 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (USA)
Jamaica: Chambers (Taylor 46) - Richie, Thomas, Talbott (Lawes 86), McCarthy, Isaacs, Vassell (Anglin 58), Walker (Marsh 63), Clennon (Murray 46), Beckford, Fletcher (Malcolm 74).
Bermuda: Bell - Brangman, Bather, Harris, Blankendal (Bean 74), Lambe, Robinson (Basden 63), Clemons, Furbert (Douglas 63), Smith, Bascome.

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Fierce...Wisla's Zdenek Ondrasek is challenged by Hubert Wolakiewicz of Cracovia

WISLA KRAKOW v CRACOVIA

For more than 100 years the people of Krakow have been divided by football loyalties

Rather being called a "*clasico*" of some sort, you know the Krakow derby is going to be fiercer than most when it goes by the name of "The Holy War".

With their stadiums just 500metres apart and opposing fans living side by side in the sprawling estates nearby, there is certainly no love lost between the two oldest surviving clubs in Poland.

The term was originally coined in the 1920s by Cracovia defender Ludwik Gintel and sums up the hostility between the two neighbours. In 2006, eight supporters were killed in events leading up to the centenary of the fixture.

Once the club of the communist police, Wisla are by the far the more successful of the two teams, with 14 league titles – a record they share with Gornik Zabrze – compared to Cracovia's four.

It had, however, been a different scenario this term, with Wisla fourth from bottom and Cracovia flying high in third, with dreams of a first title since 1948, until the suspension of football across Europe. WS

Fired up...a Cracovia fan

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

1908 Sep 20
Although earlier matches are known to have taken place, this is the first recorded game of which the score is known and ends in a 1-1 draw.

1948 Dec 5
Having finished joint top of the table, a play-off game to decide that season's champions sees Cracovia beat Wisla 3-1.

2020 Mar 3
Although Wisla are struggling in the league this season, they win 2-0 at Cracovia in the most recent meeting between the two sides.

ON BOTH SIDES

KRZYSZTOF HAUSNER	RYSZARD SARNAT	HENRYK SZYMANOWSKI	JANUSZ SUROWIEC	MICHAL PROBIERZ
● 1962-67	● 1967-70	● 1971-83	● 1973-77	● (coach) 2012
● 1968-70	● 1970-74	● 1983-85	● 1977-85	● (coach) 2017-present

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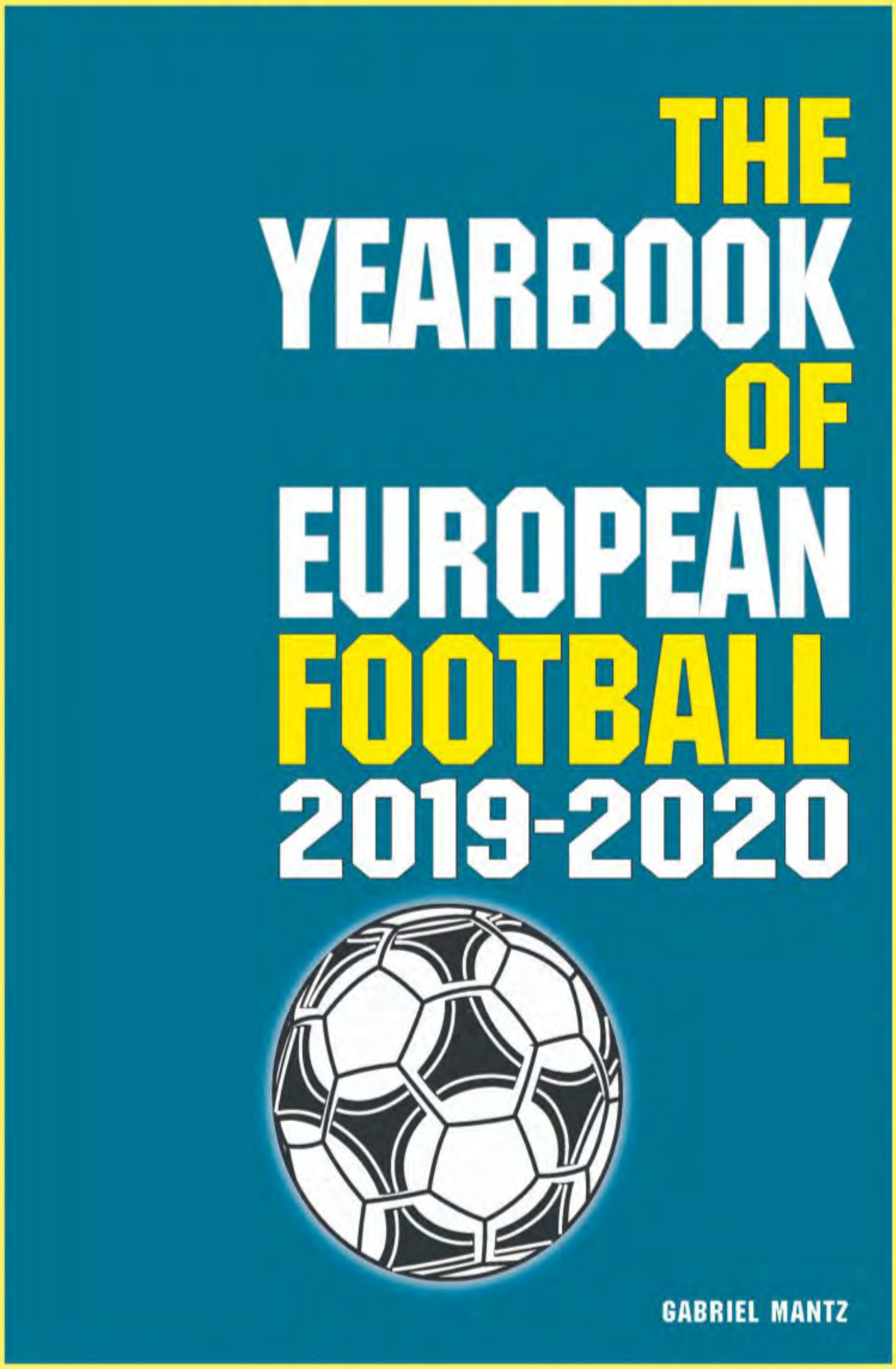

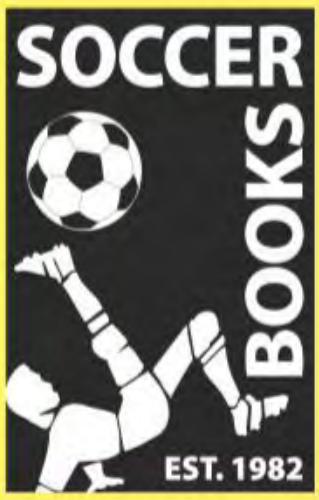

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